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ABSTRACT

A great deal of attention has been focused on adult literacy by policy makers, employers, unions, and government. An by policy makers, employers, unions, and state and federal government. An and values related to literacy. The National Literacy Act of 1991 has the potential to develop an essential long-term infrastructure. Some basic questions must be addressed. What is literacy? The definition has evolved from simple reading and writing to literacy in social settings. Literacy education varies depending on whether literacy is viewed as skills, as tasks, as social and cultural practices, or as critical reflection and action. Who has power in literacy education? Learner participation ranges from teachers depositing information into students' minds to learner-centered instruction in which students participate in developing materials to participatory literacy efforts in which students share power and responsibility for curriculum development, instruction, and program management. What is the purpose of literacy education? Literacy can be used for individual social mobility or for community development and social change. Individually oriented and community-oriented approaches vary depending on which view of literacy underlies them. A number of issues should be considered: policy and leadership, developing and supporting the literacy work force, work and literacy, literacy skills for women and families, and learner assessment and program evaluation. The prevailing view of literacy as a short-term crisis undermines efforts to build a supportive infrastructure. Adult literacy education is growing and evolving, moving from a narrow view of literacy as discrete skills to a richer understanding of the relationship between literacy, culture, and people. (Contains 130 references.) (SK)

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career,
& Vocational Education

Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions

An Update

by
Hanna Arlene Fingeret

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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FOREWORD

The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) is 1 of 16 clearinghouses in a national information system that is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. This publication was developed to fulfill one of the functions of the clearinghouse–interpreting the literature in the ERIC database. Since it was issued in 1984, the first edition of ***Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions*** has been widely cited in the literature on adult literacy, and the growth of the field in the last 8 years warrants this update.

ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Hanna Arlene Fingeret for her work in preparing this paper. Dr. Fingeret is Executive Director of Literacy South and Adjunct Associate Professor, North Carolina State University. She has served as a consultant to a range of social service and education programs involved in literacy, including the North Carolina Governor's Commission on Literacy, the U.S. Department of Education's National Literacy Initiative, Laubach Literacy International, and Literacy Volunteers of America. Among her publications are ***They Really Put a Hurtin' on My Brain: Learning in Literacy Volunteers of New York City***, ***Participatory Literacy Education*** (with Paul Jurmo), and "Social Network: A Perspective on Independence and Illiterate Adults."

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Executive Director
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Literacy South is a nonprofit organization that believes that all adults have the right to literacy education that respects their culture, dignity, and wisdom. We provide professional and organizational development assistance to literacy and community organizations in participatory literacy education. We also conduct research and publish new writers' work. My colleagues on the staff of Literacy South–Page McCullough, Jeroann King, and Jonathan Estes–have been central to my thinking and writing. I appreciate their assistance reading earlier versions of this piece, their enthusiasm for our mutual learning, and their general support and commitment to our shared work.

Hanna Arlene Fingeret

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 8 years since the publication of the first edition of *Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions* (Fingeret 1984), a great deal of attention has been focused on adult literacy by policy makers, employers, unions, and state and federal government. Recent emphasis on workplace and family literacy is an outgrowth of concerns with economic competition, and an increasing body of work is challenging conventional assumptions and values related to literacy.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 has the potential to develop the long-term infrastructure that is essential for making a significant impact on the literacy development. What kind of vision is necessary to respond to the need for improved literacy skills? Some basic questions about any literacy effort must be addressed.

What is literacy? The definition has evolved from simple reading and writing skills to literacy in social settings. The notion of multiple literacies is emerging. Literacy education varies depending on whether literacy is viewed as skills, as tasks, as social and cultural practices, or as critical reflection and action.

Who has power in literacy education? The continuum of learner participation ranges from teachers depositing information into students' minds to learner-centered instruction in which students participate in developing materials to participatory literacy efforts in which students share power and responsibility for curriculum development, instruction, and program management.

What is the purpose of literacy education? Literacy can be used for individual social mobility or for community development and social change. Individually oriented and community-oriented approaches vary depending on which view of literacy underlies them.

As adult literacy research and practice evolve, a number of issues should be considered:

- **Policy and leadership**–assumptions of public policy makers, development of an infrastructure, strategic application of public and private funding, and constraints on leadership and research

- **Developing and supporting the literacy work force**–staff development for volunteer and part-time instructors, difficult working conditions

- **Work and literacy**–short-term crisis intervention, effectiveness of job-related basic skills programs, integration of literacy instruction with job content, remediation versus developmental orientation, assessment problems

- **Literacy skills for women and families**–need for more research on effectiveness; concern that focus on women in welfare reform, family, and homeless programs may reinforce domestication

- **Assessment and program evaluation**–problems with standardized tests treating literacy as a set of discrete skills, need for alternative forms of assessment, relationship between student assessment and program evaluation

The prevailing view of literacy as a short-term crisis undermines efforts to build a supportive infrastructure. Despite the constraints, adult literacy education is growing and evolving, moving from a narrow view of literacy as discrete skills to a richer understanding of the relationship among literacy, culture, and people.

Information on adult literacy education may be found in the ERIC system using the following descriptors: Adult Basic Education, Adult Educators, *Adult Literacy, *Definitions, Educational Finance, *Educational Objectives, Educational Policy, Educational Research, Leadership, *Literacy Education, Politics of Education, Public Policy, Staff Development, and the following identifiers: *Family Literacy, *Workplace Literacy. Asterisks indicate particularly relevant terms.

INTRODUCTION

It has been an exciting 8 years since the publication of the first edition of *Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions* (Fingeret 1984). At that time there was growing concern for adult literacy as a national social issue, but the literature remained dominated by university researchers and traditional Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. It was typified by attitudes, beliefs, and values that had changed little over the preceding 20 years.

Things are different now. An unyielding sluggish economy has promoted interest in adult literacy on the part of policy makers, organized labor, large and small employers, and policy analysts. This has led to increased attention to literacy policy and, ultimately, to new federal legislation as well as an increased level of financial support for literacy work in many states.

Women, adults whose native language is not English, and adults from minority ethnic backgrounds traditionally have been undereducated, and it is predicted that persons from these groups will be the majority of new workers over the next 20 years (Johnston and Packer 1987). Thus, work force development is a focus of adult literacy education, as a natural outgrowth of concerns with economic competitiveness and growth. The field's attempts to respond to the needs of these groups has led to the development of workplace and family literacy programs; these areas are reflected in a sizable portion of the literature base.

There is much more attention now to helping adults develop writing skills than there was 8 years ago; publications of student writings abound. There is a generally accepted understanding in the field that reading and writing go hand in hand, although there are still many literacy programs that believe students must wait until they have a certain level of proficiency in reading before they can begin to write. Students' voices are more present in the literature now than they were 8 years ago. This reflects publishing of student writing, but it also reflects an increasing amount of qualitative research in which students speak for themselves. There also are more literacy workers and authors who are sensitive to issues about how power is allocated in literacy programs. Overall, there has been an increased amount of work in the last 8 years that challenges conventional wisdom in constructive ways and an increasing number of adult literacy educators who appear to be questioning the assumptions and values that have been handed down historically.

Adult literacy problems always have been viewed as a short-term crisis, requiring short-term intervention. In the 1960s we were going to eradicate poverty and, with it, illiteracy. In the 1970s, everyone had a Right to Read and illiteracy was going to be eliminated in the decade. In the 1980s, the Presidential Literacy Initiative was going to to be the last gasp for illiteracy, and in the 1990s we have America 2000, with one of its goals that everyone will be literate by the year 2000. In none of these initiatives is there evidence of the long-term commitment that is necessary

for literacy development to take its place as part of a larger pledge to lifelong learning in society. However, the National Literacy Act of 1991 has the potential to put in place federal structures, such as the National Institute for Literacy and a network of state and regional resource centers, that can provide the foundation for a long-term infrastructure.

This paper explores the issues found in the adult literacy literature in North America today. The basic questions that need to be asked about any literacy effort are explored in the first section of this paper: What is literacy? Who has power in literacy education? and What is the purpose of literacy education? The second section illustrates the implications of these ideas as they are embedded in the major issues facing the field today: policy and leadership, developing and supporting the literacy work force, and the development of instructional programs tailored to specific people in concrete situations such as families, work, and community life.

This paper is based upon examination of publications and the author's own experience. It is intended to provide a framework for thinking about issues in adult literacy education and some guidance about where to begin investigating particular aspects of the field. It is not intended to be inclusive, as the literature base is enormous and multidisciplinary, but rather to provide some tools for further thinking, practice, and study.

ASKING THE BASIC QUESTIONS

Many of us were taught in school that literacy is "learning your ABC's." Starting with the letters of the alphabet, we moved to sounds, simple words, sentences, and, finally, paragraphs. We had workbooks with blanks to be filled in with the right letters or the right words; meaningful reading usually was saved for library story hours or, if we were lucky, bedtime reading with parents or older siblings. Writing was about penmanship and grammar and correct punctuation.

In the last 20 years our understanding of literacy has changed from this kind of focus on individual skills, separated from meaningful content. We now see that literacy is connected to the social, historical, political, cultural, and personal situations in which people use their skills. In other words, claiming to be skilled in literacy depends on who you are, what you can do, where you are, and when you are. Being a literate African American in New York City in 1992 is different from being a literate African American in New York City in 1792 or in New Delhi in 1992. And being a literate store owner in New York City in 1992 will differ from being a lawyer; literacy skills cannot be separated from the content and setting of the messages being read and written. Beginning with these basic definitional issues about literacy, this section then explores how literacy education is organized and managed, addressing issues of power, practices, and purpose.

What Is Literacy?

Literacy is a shifting, abstract term, impossible to define in isolation from a specific time, person, place, and culture; literacy, therefore, is described as historically and culturally relative. Illiteracy can be understood only in relation to literacy; it is the absence or lack of literacy, rather than a concept with its own set of characteristics and standards. Definitions of literacy share an emphasis on reading, writing, and, usually, computation skills but differ in their descriptions of the extent of skill and the criteria for application. For example, in one setting persons who can sign their name may be considered literate, whereas in another setting literacy is viewed as the ability to read a complex manual and apply the information to a task. Some authors talk about many literacies rather than one literacy to help us understand that individual literacy abilities exist on a number of continua in relation to time, situation, purpose, content, and people (Gillespie 1990). Therefore, statistics on the amount of illiteracy vary, generally due to the use of different definitions and related ways of measuring, or counting, illiterate adults. Clearly, literacy is a social construct rather than an act of nature (Bormuth 1974).

Criteria for literacy have moved steadily upward in the past 50 years. In the 1930s and 1940s, the U.S. Census Bureau referred to the simple ability to read and write a message (Cook 1977). When it became apparent that this did not guarantee the effective or critical application of those skills, functional literacy emerged as a

term connoting the use of reading and writing skills in specific contexts. Functional literacy, however, tends to focus on the instrumental uses of literacy, and the ways that educated, literate people function are set as the standard against which those with fewer literacy abilities are measured.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) has conducted a series of national studies for the U.S. government designed to profile the literacy skills of young adults (Kirsch and Jungeblut 1986), adults seeking assistance through Department of Labor programs (Kirsch, Jungeblut, and Campbell 1992) and the entire adult population in the United States (in process). For this purpose, ETS developed a definition that attempts to recognize that literacy is both self-defined and defined by the larger society: "Literacy is using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Kirsch and Jungeblut 1986, p. 3). It also implies that there is a relationship between literacy and personal power or control over life circumstances (see, for example, Street 1992).

ETS's studies plot adults' skills on scales for prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy; adults may score higher on some scales than on others. These studies have been influential in moving the field away from talking about a single point at which a person moves from being "illiterate" to being "literate."

In most settings, adult literacy education is viewed as teaching English language speakers how to read and write in English; services for adults whose native language is other than English continue to be categorized as "English as a second language" (ESL). This includes persons who may have advanced education and literacy skills in their native language as well as those who have literacy skills in no language at all. ESL literacy teaching is defined by Wrigley and Guth (1992) as follows:

> Supporting adults with little English and little formal education in their efforts to understand and use English in its many forms (oral and written . . .), in a variety of contexts . . ., so that they can reach their fullest potential and achieve their own goals, whether these be personal, professional, or academic. (pp. 7-8)

ETS' studies and most of the research on literacy in the United States counts only English language literacy; the extent to which adults may be literate in another language is not considered important. However, literacy in another language, particularly in one's native language, may significantly contribute to their ability to develop English language literacy as well as influencing many other aspects of their lives. Wrigley and Guth (1992) explain that–

> the nature of ESL literacy is still more complex since it depends on literacy in two languages: the native language of the learner and English literacy. Since the degree of literacy in the first language can significantly influence the speed and depth of literacy development in the second language, the relationship between the two language systems needs to be taken into account. Since language and literacy are socially determined, ESL literacy is also influenced by two cultures: the learners' home culture and its literacy practices and the mainstream culture and its expectations of English literacy. (p. 6)

The extensiveness of literacy problems leads to the need and desire for literacy education services. Many literate adults look back on learning to read as children and marvel at how natural the process seemed. Their children often learn to read before entering school, participating with ease in daily interactions with print in the home, in stores, and on roads. For many other adults, however, learning to read as an adult is a struggle filled with shame that continues from public school days. Some of these adults come to adult literacy programs for help; their courage is an inspiration for us all.

Effective literacy practitioners work with adult learners to help them use their life experience as a positive foundation for continuing to learn, supported by concerned policy makers, funders, the media, and corporate leaders. ESL literacy education must also take into account learners' native language; it too can become a resource for instruction, as Wrigley and Guth explain:

> Teaching literacy in the native language/mother tongue of the learners is one of the best options for programs serving nonliterate learners who share a common language. Learning to read and write in a language they understand, instead of in a language they are trying to acquire, affords students a measure of power and control that is not easily matched in an adult ESL literacy class. . . . Programs that offer mother tongue literacy differ in their aims. Some have full biliteracy and bilingualism as their goal. . . . Others see literacy acquisition in the native language primarily as a stepping stone to English literacy. (p. 107)

Literacy education varies, depending on whether service providers view literacy as discrete skills, discrete tasks, social and cultural practices, or critical reflection and action (this framework is drawn from Lytle and Wolfe 1989). Literacy programs embody different arrangements about power relationships and are oriented to individual growth and change as well as larger visions of social change.

Literacy as Skills

The view of *literacy as skills* continues to permeate literacy education. In this view, literacy is seen as a set of discrete skills that exist regardless of context. This conception of literacy leads to focusing on simple encoding and decoding skills: "sounding out" words and studying lists of letter sounds, syllable sounds, and words in isolation. In the skills model, adults are told that they must learn "general" literacy skills first, and then they can use those skills to learn content or other kinds of skills. Thus, if nonreading adults want to learn job skills, they are referred to a kind of "generic" literacy program first, in which the content used for instruction is considered only tangentially important. Then–sometimes years later–they are referred to a job training program. Skill-oriented programs assume that students will automatically accumulate skills up to a certain point and then will automatically be able to use those skills in their lives.

Literacy as Tasks

The Adult Performance Levels work in the 1970s (Northcutt et al. 1975) respected the importance of viewing reading and writing skills as a way to accomplish something such as reading a bus schedule or filling in a form. In this notion of *literacy as tasks*, literacy is viewed as the ability to apply skills independently and successfully to accomplish specific tasks. However, this approach does not take into

account the situation in which someone does the task; the ability to do the task is considered stable across situations and requires only individual skill achievement. In other words, we assume that filling in an application form in literacy class is the same task as filling in that form in the personnel office–in this view, the situation does not change the nature of the task. Task-oriented instruction tends to assume that students will automatically transfer whatever they learn to do in class into their lives. Some task-oriented teachers develop their own curriculum, using materials drawn from local newspapers, restaurants, or employers, for example, to construct literacy tasks for instructional purposes rather than relying on commercial materials.

Literacy as Social and Cultural Practices

Many literacy students find that literacy tasks change in different situations; for example, using their cultural knowledge, they fill in the form for the welfare system somewhat differently than the form applying for credit to buy a new couch. Or their nervousness in line at the bank makes filling in the application for a checking account a different task than it was while sitting in class the evening before. When we place literacy tasks in their social and cultural settings, we understand more about *literacy as social and cultural practices*. Practitioners in effective ESL literacy programs focus on culture and meanings and begin from a position of respecting students' rich cultural experiences. Their work naturally focuses on literacy as practices, because their students' immediate needs often have to do with social situations such as work, housing, food, health care, and child care; some programs develop critical literacy as well.

Programs looking at literacy as practices bring the program to the community, helping students use new skills to accomplish tasks in their social situations. Describing literacy as practices does not imply that literacy is only instrumental; it simply means that we engage in literacy in a social setting, and we cannot separate the setting from our literacy behaviors. Thus, reading a novel while sitting in a busy doctor's waiting room requires some different abilities than does reading a novel while sitting quietly at home.

There are far fewer programs oriented to literacy as practices; these programs face the difficult challenge of figuring out how to dissolve the barriers between the program and the community. They also have to help students deal with the stress and anxiety of trying new skills and tasks in new situations.

Literacy as Critical Reflection and Action

A healthy democracy depends on citizens who are able to use information critically; they are able to uncover underlying biases, assumptions, beliefs, and contradictions in text and to use their own experience and cultural knowledge to interpret the meaning of texts. In a presidential campaign, for example, critically literate citizens will read about candidates' views on issues and will ask such questions as "What does this position say about who will have power and who will not?" in addition to asking "What does this position mean for me?" and "What does this position mean for the country?" Their critical analysis may lead to some kind of action, such as writing letters, doing additional reading, attending a school board meeting, and so on. Literacy education that helps new readers learn how to ask such questions and become involved in social action is oriented to *literacy as critical reflection and action*.

Literacy is seen as a means for adults to challenge the traditional distribution of knowledge and power in their communities and in the larger society. It is a philosophy in which action and reflection are intertwined as adults work together for a more just society.

Definitions in Practice

The approach to literacy as skills has come under attack in the last decade. Many researchers agree that it is not consistent with cognitive research findings and it tends to produce unmotivating, boring instructional approaches. Furthermore, deCastell and Luke (1987) assert: "Reliance on technocratic skills-based approaches . . . has resulted, on the one hand, in a gradual deskilling of teachers and, on the other hand, the production in students of a literal, uncritical, and mechanical relation to reading, writing, and the interpretation of texts" (p. 413).

Many literacy educators today define literacy in terms of practices; they explain that literacy is an adult's ability to apply reading, writing, listening, speaking, and quantitative skills to accomplish daily life tasks. However, most literacy educators' practice actually is oriented to literacy as skills and tasks, assuming that adults will automatically transfer their new knowledge and skills to engage in new literacy practices in their lives.

For example, literacy programs almost always approach check writing as a task. Approaching literacy as tasks that are connected to each other and to the social setting–practices–means that reading, writing, speaking, and listening are interwoven. They teach students how to spell the numbers, how to fill in each line on a check, how to keep the check register, and how to balance a checkbook. Students practice and become confident in class. However, check writing becomes a practice only when students leave class and start writing checks while standing in line at the grocery store or at the teller's window in the bank. Many students who can write checks in class never use checks in their lives because they are too scared to write a check while strangers may be watching. Or some refugees and welfare recipients may be penalized for accumulating money.

Instructional technology is only beginning to incorporate a definition of literacy as tasks or practices. Some programs use tape recorders or video to capture scenes in the community that become translated into curriculum materials. Some ESL programs use video for critical reflection literacy instruction:

> Through case studies shown on tape, videos can provide insights into the sociocultural dimension of literacy and provide opportunities for problem solving. When the stories presented on tape touch on personal problems or social issues, they can act as a starting point for problem-posing. (Wrigley and Guth 1992, pp. 84-85)

Computer-assisted instruction, however, most often still reflects a skills-based notion of literacy; its effectiveness appears to be due to the students' increased willingness to spend time on a computer when a similar workbook in paper is too boring.

Shame and self-blame are among the barriers to students changing their lives by introducing new literacy practices (Center for Working Life 1991; Fingeret and Danin 1991). Students often feel strong in many areas of their lives, but they know that the larger society is contemptuous of their inability to read and write well. Engaging in new literacy tasks in

social situations can create such a high level of stress that performance anxiety interferes with new practices; adults "go blank" and question their ability to learn (Fingeret and Danin 1991). Explicit attention to literacy as practices means that students learn to reduce their stress and develop the ability to write out the check while at the bank. In addition, students can learn to ask such questions as how the bank uses their money and who decides about interest rates. They can investigate different banks' investment practices and help each other choose their banks. This links viewing literacy as practices and seeing literacy as critical reflection and action.

These four conceptions of literacy build on each other. Skills are incorporated into literacy tasks. Instruction in tasks, such as check writing, includes attention to skills such as vowel sounds. However, the purpose of literacy has to do with meaning and using skills to accomplish a task, rather than skills being viewed as ends in themselves. Likewise, instruction in literacy practices includes attention to specific tasks which, in turn, incorporates attention to specific skills. But skills are taught in the context of tasks and practices rather than in the abstract, and tasks are addressed in the context of social and cultural settings rather than only on workbook pages.

Instruction that addresses literacy as critical reflection and action incorporates instruction in skills, tasks, and practices. However, the meanings associated with the text are treated as problematical rather than as given; students learn to ask another level of critical questions as they learn to write out the check or to spell the numbers. In all cases, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are interwoven.

Who Has Power in Literacy Education?

There are many levels of decisions in literacy education, including decisions about program administration, such as staffing, scheduling, or location; decisions about the theoretical model of literacy embraced by the program; decisions about the political processes of involvement in decision making; and instructional decisions about the ways in which literacy is taught and progress assessed. The power to make these decisions may be maintained by one person or a small administrative staff, or it may be shared more broadly with students and teachers. Administrators often share the power to make some decisions with some persons while retaining other decisions for themselves. Programs are considered to be more participatory as they share the power of decision making with a broader ranger of persons over a larger number of types of decisions.

Banking Education

The "banking" model of education is at one end of a continuum of participation; the "expert" teacher is viewed as depositing information into passive students' minds (Freire 1970). The banking notion of education derives from the deficit perspective in which adults with low literacy skills are seen as incompetent; knowledgeable teachers are needed to diagnose needs and prescribe cures (see Beder 1991 for a more extensive discussion of the deficit model and its consequences). Although most instructors are sensitive to the negative images associated with banking models of education, they nonetheless often invoke its properties by using commercial curriculum materials that are irrelevant to students' lives and teaching in ways that focus on skills rather than on students' lives and culture.

When the curriculum appears to be irrelevant and the instructional process seems to reproduce earlier negative experiences with schooling, nonreading adults often make choices not to participate in literacy programs. Rather than being "unmotivated," "having low aspirations," or being "afraid of more failure," these adults often have decided that school has failed them, rather than the reverse. They identify costs with returning to school; they may become socially isolated and their new skills can be threatening to others (see Fingeret 1983; Klassen 1991; Reder and Green 1985; Ziegahn 1991 for more extensive discussions of social networks). These costs may be more than they are willing to pay when their experience and knowledge are disrespected.

Learner-Centered Literacy Instruction

Students can share the power in the instructional process, participating in developing instructional materials that respond to students' interests and respect their culture and prior learning. This kind of instruction is considered learner centered, with varying degrees of participation.

Recent cognitive science research shows that people learn new things by relating them to what they already know (Sticht and McDonald 1989); learner-centered instruction provides opportunities for students and teachers to work together creating experiences that build on students' prior knowledge and connect to learners' existing cognitive structures, or schemata (Rumelhart 1981). Efficient instruction helps learners connect what they already know to what they are reading.

This makes sense intuitively to people who are quite literate and have tried to read a piece of technical material in an area in which they have no prior background. An advanced nuclear physics journal is understandable to a nuclear physicist, but to a humanist with no nuclear physics training, it will appear quite obtuse–even though that humanist can read extremely sophisticated materials in the humanities field quite competently. Indeed, much of the power of scientists such as Carl Sagan (for example, 1977) who have popularized technical scientific information is their ability to relate technical concepts to familiar ones.

Learner-centered literacy work incorporates cognitive science findings by emphasizing the importance of meaning and students' background knowledge. Therefore, it requires that students be active participants in creating curriculum and making decisions about instruction, since teachers cannot know about learners' prior experience unless they engage students in an ongoing conversation in which prior experience and new learning are continually interwoven. Learner-centered literacy programs often approach literacy as tasks and practices; skills-based models do not allow for attention to meaning, which is central to a learner-centered philosophy. Weinstein-Shr (1990) provides a rich case study that illustrates the ways in which meaning and culture are connected. She documents how her understanding of three individuals changed as she moved from encountering them in class to interacting with them in community activities. Her recommendations for working with second language learners are appropriate for the larger literacy community as well; learner-centered instruction relies on viewing students as whole persons who are socially situated, rather than simply observing their classroom behavior.

Learner-centered instruction also respects the range of students' learning styles, which implies that adults learn in a variety

of ways. Some of these may be considered disabilities rather than differences. The topic of learning disabilities is controversial in adult literacy education. Bingman (1989), writing from one perspective, defines adults with learning disabilities as–

> people whose intelligence is at least "normal" but who have difficulty learning to read, write, and spell because of some disability in their language processing . . . there are others who have a hard time learning to read because they have limited intelligence or a physical disability in hearing or vision. . . . They are not learning disabled. (p. 19)

Bingman explains further:

> To a large extent the important issue is how the person learns and doesn't learn. This is an issue with any student. Educational diagnosis, continually observing and discussing with the student what works and what doesn't is probably the most important part of "diagnosis." (p. 19-20)

Attention to learning style is much broader than looking at possible disability; all teachers need to respond to students' learning styles and respect their dignity, whether or not that style is considered a disability. Bingman explores the ways that learning styles provide insights that can be useful for teaching:

> The term "learning style" is often used for different concepts. Probably we are most familiar with learning style as learning modalities–visual auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile . . . another way to look at learning style is in terms of "global" versus "analytic" styles. Global learners are whole word readers and learn holistically, whereas analytic learners learn things in sequential steps. . . . The differences in the right and left hemisphere of the brain give rise to a similar theory of learning style. "Left-brain" people tend to like sequence, be more structured and systematic, solve problems by looking at parts, are excellent planners, and are analytic. Those who are more "right-brain" people are involved with visual-spatial activities and are more random and spontaneous; they see patterns, solve problems by looking at the whole picture, and arrive at accurate conclusions intuitively. . . . Other learning style theorists look at environmental preferences in determining learning style. (pp. 17-18)

Participatory Literacy Instruction

Programs in which students share the power and responsibility for developing the curriculum, delivering instruction, and organizing and managing the program are considered to be more participatory. They move beyond learner-centered instruction's orientation to meaning and culture to incorporate student participation in other program dimensions and to deal explicitly with power relationships. Participatory literacy programs have been slow to develop partly due to deeply internalized negative stereotypes of adults with low literacy abilities. We tend to see nonreading adults as incompetent parents, citizens, workers, and community members, on the one hand, or needing salvation, on the other. Beder (1991) explains that this deficit perspective "demeans the subculture from which adult literacy students come. It hinders teachers from comprehending the meanings their students

ascribe to the world, and it prohibits teachers from gearing instruction to their students' own experience" (p. 145).

Participatory literacy programs challenge the prevailing conventional wisdom because of their fundamental assumption that students are capable of participating as partners in programs (see Curtis 1990; Fingeret and Jurmo 1989; Gaber-Katz and Watson 1991). However, program staff may need help recognizing the strengths students bring to the program or the culturally related nature of program and instructional tasks. Participatory literacy education, therefore, should be viewed as a process of cross-cultural communication, negotiation, and mutual learning.

Participatory literacy programs tend to view literacy as practices and as critical reflection and action. This is consistent with their commitment to viewing literacy as political work and their interest in examining power relationships inside the program and in relation to their larger communities. When students play a large role in program governance, there is a better chance that curriculum will be relevant and the program will be learner centered as well as participatory. When learners and teachers are unable to imagine education that is integrally connected to students' culture and experience, however, it is possible for a participatory program to mirror the larger society's view of literacy as skills and tasks.

Instructional Arrangements

Literacy instruction is conducted usually in small groups or in one-to-one relationships, particularly with volunteers. Banking, learner-centered, and participatory literacy education can take place in both arrangements; however, group instruction may particularly facilitate students developing a sense of their own strengths and power as they work together on common issues and concerns (Fingeret and Danin 1991). Group instruction has a proud history in adult literacy; groups were used in the Kentucky Moonlight Schools and the Citizenship Schools of the civil rights movement in the South (Bingman et al. 1991). Learner-centered group instruction was mandated in Tennessee in the early 1990s. When Bingman et al. (1991) interviewed ABE teachers in Tennessee about their experience changing from one-to-one to group instruction, they found that "group instruction is valued," "concerns about organizing groups quickly disappear," and "group instruction tends to create a greater feeling of success among students" (p. 1).

Since many ESL literacy learners are developing oral as well as written English literacy skills, group interaction is particularly important. Wrigley and Guth (1992), responding to the idea of providing worksheets for adults to work individually on their skills, assert:

> [This] is not an effective way to help language minority adults develop literacy. Since true literacy development is a cognitive process that develops in response to a social need, literacy students learn best in groups. Group interactions allow learners to explore ideas through talking and reading, get feedback on their written ideas, and respond to the ideas of others. . . . ESL learners should not be deprived of the benefit that literacy groups provide. (pp. 66-67)

Most software developed for computer-assisted literacy instruction is designed to be used by individuals working alone, with notable exceptions (such as software recently developed by the Educational Testing Service); however, students work in pairs and small groups in some literacy

programs to make decisions about using the technology and to adapt it to group interaction (Wrigley and Guth 1992).

New Writers' Literature

Another level of power in literacy programs has to do with who controls the content of the curriculum. Learner-centered and participatory literacy work uses curriculum materials that reflect the learners' culture and experience and engages learners in using literacy in ways that mirror literacy use in their lives. Therefore, materials often are created by learners and teachers, and instruction involves writing as well as reading.

Writing is no longer viewed simply as a skill involving correctly forming letters, spelling, and using grammar and punctuation rules. Adult educators have learned from writing process theorists such as Elbow (1973, 1981) and Graves (1983) to approach writing as a process of communicating meaningful information that is analogous to viewing reading as a process of constructing meaning through interaction with the text. The act of writing is a stage in a larger process of helping students reflect on their experience, read to increase their knowledge and stimulate their thinking, write to express their thoughts, and share or publish to bring their work into the community of learners for further reflection and learning. It has emerged as a powerful tool for helping students develop a sense of their own social and political power and assisting personal and community development. Handbooks such as those by Gillespie (1990), Cheatham and Lawson (1990), and Clarke (1991) help teachers learn to make the transition from more traditional views of writing instruction.

Teachers use students' writing in a number of ways. Many use it for further instruction, so that student writing rather than commercial workbooks becomes the text for working on specific skills. This satisfies the need for relevant materials in learner-centered programs that approach literacy as tasks and practices. Writing is increasingly shared with others in a rapidly developing literature of published stories, poems, autobiographies, and essays by new writers (see Gillespie 1991 for an extensive bibliography).

> These publications are a source of validation for the writers, relevant reading material for the readers, and leadership opportunities for student editors. They also are a source of insight for the larger society. New writers have an authentic voice that speaks of their experience to a society that is not used to hearing them. Their literature may fill a need for readers with low print literacy skills, but it also now is accessible to those with many years of schooling who may be moved by its eloquence. It profoundly challenges the prevailing stereotypes of adults with low literacy skill levels. (Fingeret 1990, p. 42)

Programs that approach literacy as critical reflection often engage students in a kind of systematic reflection and analysis through writing that can lead to social action and community development (McClellan-Cason et al. 1992; Schwabacher 1989). Groups of literacy students and community residents may develop a community history or may conduct a research project about the economic base of the community, for example. Community writing projects also help adults develop a new relationship to concepts such as "history" when they realize that their own stories are the data of oral history (Breen and Sobel 1991). Although the products of their work can be useful and interesting

to other new writers in other communities, the power of the activity is in the process of creating the literature. For example, the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and the Lonsdale Improvement Organization in Knoxville conducted a community history project that combined literacy skills development and community organizing. The resulting community oral history book (McClellan-Cason et al. 1992) heightens community pride, involves new people in the organization, provides a text for continued literacy work, and creates a foundation for a continued relationship between community development and literacy development.

What Is the Purpose of Literacy Education?

Literacy programs oriented to skill development, learning to accomplish specific tasks in the classroom, and developing the ability to participate in new literacy practices in the community usually are oriented to individual change; this includes most learner-centered and participatory programs as well. These programs try to help individuals fit into mainstream society and to succeed in employment, schooling, parenting, and other arenas in ways that are defined by the mainstream society. Literacy educators in these *individually oriented* programs (Fingeret 1984) talk about empowerment for individuals, or helping persons feel an enhanced sense of control over their lives. Instruction may address tasks and practices that lead to social mobility, such as preparing for a higher paying job. However, such programs do not address the fact that learners may need to move in order to find new employment, leaving their communities behind.

A much smaller group of literacy programs is focused on social action and is concerned with helping literacy students develop skills that serve larger purposes of community development and social change. These *community-oriented* programs (Fingeret 1984) tend to approach literacy as practices and as critical reflection and action; their curriculum reflects the community residents' concerns, such as jobs, housing, child care, transportation, care for the elderly, and crime. Classrooms can also become communities, supporting class members in a process of mutual growth and development and providing a new base from which students can engage with their geographical or cultural communities (Weinstein-Shr 1990).

Participatory programs that are oriented to community development and social action offer an alternative to individually oriented programs in which students work as partners with literacy workers to design programs and instruction that are not only tailored to their needs and respect their backgrounds, but also support them in working with their communities to develop a better quality of life for everyone. This offers change to the community rather than disruption to individuals lives. For example, adults who attend literacy programs in poor rural areas often must move to find new jobs that allow them to use their new abilities. Community-based literacy programs can integrate community economic development and literacy education to help residents develop jobs locally while increasing their literacy abilities.

Gaber-Katz and Watson's (1991) participatory study identifies three elements of community-based literacy: it is learner centered, it approaches literacy from a critical perspective, and it engages in community building. Curtis (1990) presents four components of literacy programs that are oriented to social change: fundamental skills, critical thinking, cultural expression, and individual/

community action. Both models explain ways of integrating attention to skill development, new literacy practices, critical reflection, and social action.

Conclusion

There is no necessary relationship among the various positions on these dimensions of literacy education. However, certain choices are more philosophically consistent with each other. Therefore, they are more likely to be found together in programs in which the staff and participants have made an effort to develop a coherent instructional philosophy.

Literacy can be viewed as the accumulation of a set of skills, as the ability to do particular tasks, as the capacity to engage in specific cultural and social practices, or as the ability to participate in a process of critical reflection and action. These four conceptions build on each other, and they are incorporated into different ways of allocating power in literacy education. Banking education usually reflects a skills-based view of literacy as students are passive recipients of discrete bits of knowledge. Learner-centered education provides more opportunities for students to share power in the instructional process; literacy often is seen as tasks and practices that reflect students' cultural and social settings. Students also move into governance positions in participatory literacy education; the emphasis on sharing power in these programs can also lead to concern with critical literacy skills.

Literacy can be used for individual social mobility as well as for community development and social change. When programs are individually oriented, they tend to approach literacy as skills, tasks, or practices. Community-oriented programs, however, help participants question their assumptions about their ability to influence their quality of life; this often means teaching literacy as critical reflection and social action.

CURRENT ISSUES IN ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

As the perspective on literacy education shifts slowly from a crisis orientation to a more long-term commitment, public policy and leadership must provide the resources for the infrastructure that is needed. Development and support of the literacy work force is crucial to the future of the field. New approaches to staff development respect practitioners' as well as learners' prior knowledge, culture, and goals. Concurrently, alternative assessment and evaluation models contribute to the possibility of learner-centered and participatory adult literacy programs that are philosophically and theoretically coherent.

The field's present emphasis on workplace and family literacy education must be viewed with caution. Concern with specific life contexts does not necessarily imply learner-centered or participatory approaches or content relevance.

This section reviews the writing and practice in a number of areas that are particularly visible in the literature presently. Each topic also provides an opportunity to apply the basic questions presented in the previous section.

Policy and Leadership

Federal policy in adult literacy education has been based on a crisis model of literacy. Policy makers believe that the number of adults with poor literacy skills is too high; this is viewed as a temporary condition that can be changed with short-term interventions. Approaching literacy in this crisis mode results in minimal attention to creating a permanent infrastructure that will support provision of literacy services over a long time. It also leads to unstable funding and great difficulty developing leadership for the field.

However, literacy education is not a short-term crisis intervention but rather a long-term investment in lifelong learning that complements investments made in other sectors of the economy. This is due to the complexity of society, which continues to increase. Furthermore, literacy ability continues to be connected to access to political, social, and personal power; citizens must be able to initiate, manage, and respond to change in all arenas of their lives. Therefore, we have every reason to expect that adults will continue to need to improve their literacy skills over their lifetimes.

Public Policy

From the outset in the 1960s, the enabling legislation for the federal literacy program contained language supporting literacy development as a means toward other ends. Conceived of as part of the larger War on Poverty, literacy education was supposed to bring about personal economic self-sufficiency as well as contribute to the eradication of poverty in the United States. However, literacy skills are only one of many factors that contribute to economic self-sufficiency. Many adults who improve their literacy skills will remain in low-paying jobs with no hope of advancement because there are no better

jobs in their area, or because the major local employer has moved overseas, or the local corporation has racist or sexist hiring practices, or because there are no options for child care–the list could go on and on. Literacy is not just an educational issue; it is part of a complex web of social, political, and historical issues that need to be addressed by equally complex comprehensive social policies.

The same analysis holds at the level of national economic development. Policy makers assume that personal skill development leads to personal economic mobility; they also assume that increasing numbers of individual new readers will somehow create a critical mass that has an impact on larger social issues such as international economic competitiveness. But the mechanism that transforms the development of individuals' abilities into a force for social change has not been identified by policy makers or practitioners, and the relationship between these two phenomena has been controversial among academics (for example, see Graff 1979; Scribner and Cole 1981). Workplace literacy education is now seen as a response to problems of economic competitiveness, but there is no comprehensive social policy to address interrelated issues such as racism, multinational corporate ethics, educational equity, and poverty, among others.

Federal literacy policy in the last decade has emphasized the volunteer sector and has focused on getting a more "accurate" count of adults with low literacy abilities (for example, National Governors' Association 1991); these reflect a crisis orientation in which a short-term unpaid work force is to eliminate a problem that is identified with a discrete group of persons. Attention to workplace and family literacy in the last few years has the potential to bring together some of the pieces of a federal infrastructure, but they have been addressed primarily as educational issues, with the complex interrelationships among the economy, education, family, workplace, and community largely ignored.

For example, Even Start is the federal family literacy program. It brings together adult literacy and public school educators to provide interrelated programs for parents and their young children, but it does not address the economic, political, and social conditions such as poverty, school inequality, and racism that may bear on the family's situation. Welfare reform legislation in the Department of Health and Human Services is another federal program addressing family literacy; it is oriented to helping parents become economically self-sufficient. Participants in the JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) program (the educational component of the welfare reform legislation) are able to attend literacy classes for 20 hours per week–a far more intensive schedule than ordinarily possible–and literacy programs are reimbursed for up to 80 percent of their costs. However, the program also raises a host of issues about the relationship between an individual's education and economic and social mobility that are outside the narrow scope of the policy and funding.

Building an Infrastructure

The National Literacy Act, passed in 1991, has the potential to change the focus from a crisis orientation to a long-term commitment. The act establishes the National Institute for Literacy, with relationships to the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The act also provides for creating state or regional resource centers under the governor's office rather than in the state department of education. The National Literacy Act, provides the potential leadership for a new infrastructure that addresses literacy

education as an ongoing responsibility of a coordinated set of institutions.

During the 1980s, a decade of heightened visibility for adult literacy education, literacy workers have tried to institutionalize responses, to create larger structures and systems that will provide the beginning of an infrastructure and will outlast the fickle attention of the general public or policy makers. Mayors' literacy offices in many large urban areas and governor-level state literacy offices appeared; they were charged with initiating and coordinating efforts across departments such as commerce, employment and training, human services, and education. Urban and statewide coalitions formed, involving literacy practitioners, employers, policy makers, the media, public schools, higher education, and other interested parties. They provided a forum for exchanging information and, sometimes, a mechanism for developing the resource base, providing training, and distributing resources.

Several new organizations emerged to fulfill various functions related to information dissemination, staff development, technical assistance, research, and advocacy. These include national training, advocacy, and clearinghouse organizations such as the Literacy Network, the Literacy Initiative of the United Way of America, the Business Council for Effective Literacy, the National Center for Family Literacy, and the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education; urban training, clearinghouse, and support efforts such as the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston and the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City; improved field services programs in the national volunteer literacy organizations; and regional training and research organizations such as Literacy South in Durham, North Carolina, and the Center for Literacy Studies in Knoxville, Tennessee.

In the past few years, however, public and private dollars for many of these functions have been cut back, reflecting difficult economic times as well as disappointment that the literacy "crisis" has not been "fixed." Many simple services remain, such as metropolitan or statewide hotlines and clearinghouses. Many literacy educators, policy makers, and employers who participated in task forces and coalitions probably now understand each other's worlds better than they did a decade ago. But a number of privately funded national and regional organizations are in serious financial trouble, and some local and state literacy offices have lost funding. Some coalitions are in trouble, unable to overcome enormous obstacles in a difficult economy (Welfare Research Inc. 1991).

In those cases in which public funds have actually increased, those responsible for allocating the funds often do not have a theoretically based vision of the future of the field to guide their decisions. The temptation exists to do more of the same rather than to examine existing practice critically and move in new directions. The National Literacy Act requires development of indicators of quality in programs and an improved status of program evaluation, but the resources to help programs develop the ability to participate in meaningful evaluation work are meager.

Adult literacy education needs an infrastructure that will support long-term commitment to literacy as part of a comprehensive domestic social policy. This means developing the vision and the mechanisms that can bring together the emerging federal infrastructure of the National Institute for Literacy and the state and regional resource centers, the existing state and local coalitions and other structures that originally were intended to support short-term crisis intervention, and privately funded organizations that have been struggling to fill

the leadership void. It also means working across agencies to support long-term social change goals and building a work force and setting quality standards that are consistent with a long-term commitment.

It is also important to bring together literacy work with adults who are native English speakers and those who are not. There are issues unique to ESL work, but there also are many issues in common with the rest of the literacy field, including the following:

- Philosophical issues such as the role of culture and background
- Organizational issues such as the process through which a coherent organizational philosophy is developed
- Personnel issues such as the implications of the match or lack of match of background characteristics of teachers, administrators, learners, and members of the larger community in which the program is situated
- Instructional issues such as who participates in decisions around curriculum, program development, and program management

However, ESL literacy and literacy workers and students involved in programs for native English speakers rarely come together. When both program components exist in a single organization, they are often administratively separated. Each group has its own professional organizations, its own literature, and its own terminology and culture. Both will be strengthened by coming together around their common ground.

It is important that infrastructure is not developed at the cost of diversity. According to Beder (1991), "adult literacy education is a tapestry of diversity" (p. 152). He continues:

> The pluralism and diversity of the federal adult literacy program has been a functional response to the need to adapt. While accountability and the elimination of fragmentation are important goals, efforts to attain them will be counterproductive if in the long run they rob the program of its flexibility. (pp. 153-154)

Beder distinguishes between consolidation and coordination. He explains that consolidation reduces diversity for the sake of standardization, whereas coordination, "focuses on more fully integrating the parts of the delivery system through better communication and cooperation. Learners benefit and diversity is maintained" (p. 153).

It is difficult for private funders to decide how to use their money strategically when there is no infrastructure in the field. The relationships between local efforts and national impact are unclear, and it is difficult to identify the partners that will leverage change. Furthermore, there has been no forum for bringing funders together to create a long-term funding strategy.

Adult literacy funding has been unstable, although always minimal. In the 1980s there was an increase in corporate support, some additional foundation monies, and some new public funding at all levels. In the 1990s, federal and state spending has increased in specific areas, such as workplace literacy programs, family literacy (through welfare reform legislation, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs, and Even Start), and literacy for homeless adults. The status of corporate funding is unclear.

Private foundation funding has seen some impressive peaks in the last decade. However, the funding picture is bleak right now for large grant-making to support progressive service delivery, staff development, program development, research, technical assistance, and policy analysis.

Leadership

Careers in adult literacy education require a high tolerance for uncertainty; it is a difficult environment in which to develop a leadership base. Even so, some literacy educators (such as the United Literacy Workers in New York City) are exploring new types of leadership, and literacy student leadership is emerging as literacy students become more active and visible nationally.

Leadership development in adult literacy education is hindered by reliance on a hierarchical notion of leadership, in which the leader is the person with vision who mobilizes others around that vision. Often, the leader is seen as the liaison between those with power and authority and those with less power (that is, sending information between policy makers and practitioners, between administrators and teachers, between teachers and students, or between administrators and students). Advocacy for better literacy policy and funding at the federal level is conducted primarily by a small number of professionals at the top of a handful of national organizations, reflecting this traditional notion of leadership. They pass information from policy makers to practitioners, but they have not engaged the field in policy debates or advocacy efforts. Likewise, state-level administrators usually are responsible for advocacy for state-level policy and resources, with a few notable exceptions.

However, local coalitions in many places provide the foundation for involvement in local advocacy work, and in a number of areas, practitioners involve literacy students in advocating for program funds and for local and state policy that supports the program's view of literacy. In these instances, leadership begins to shift to an alternative model in which leaders are responsible for helping a group do its work (rather than mobilizing the group around the leader's work) (Heifetz and Sinder 1988; Kahn 1982). In this culture, leaders traditionally feel responsible for solving other people's problems. In the alternative view of leadership, power and authority are shared as the leader helps individuals identify the extent to which their problems are shared and then helps the group solve its own problems. The alternative to the traditional notion of leadership is based in collective rather than individual conceptualization of the issue, as well as collective action.

The traditional model of leadership limits the extent to which literacy education becomes participatory or can be approached as practices and critical reflection and action. Community-oriented literacy education implies that learners are leaders and that leadership is a collective endeavor. Thus, leadership development, community development, and community-oriented program development are interrelated.

There are few mechanisms in the field for supporting the development of leadership skills, for networking among those in leadership positions, or for creating connections among leaders at the local, state, and national levels. In addition, there is no career path in adult literacy education and there are few full-time jobs (Foster 1990), which means that the field loses leaders and potential leaders who are forced to look elsewhere for employment.

Leaders' positions are fragile; professionals as well as students often are not funded for their leadership work, and, particularly in the case of literacy students, it can endanger their nonliteracy-related jobs. Laubach Literacy Advance, a national organization for volunteer literacy programs, took the initiative for supporting student leadership development; they have been joined in the past by Literacy Volunteers of America, the United Way of America, the Literacy Network, the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forum Literacy Project, and other national organizations. This level of support is in question now, with fewer resources generally in the field and some organizations floundering.

There are a number of people of color who have emerged as leaders in literacy in the last decade. By and large, however, the field continues to be typified by white male administrators at the highest levels; white female native-English speaking teachers even in programs serving predominantly people of color and adults whose first language is not English; and an emphasis on teaching students how to accomplish tasks in the same way as middle-class white adults, with minimal sensitivity to varying cultural traditions, approaches to learning, and value systems.

However, instruction and leadership development activities are beginning to pay attention to race, class, and gender issues in literacy education in the United States today. Women are more visible in local, state, and national policy positions, and some organizations, such as the California Literacy Campaign, have made concerted efforts to diversify their volunteer participation and to become more culturally sensitive. Staff development projects such as "Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy" in Massachusetts (funded by the National Institute for Literacy) are helping members of minority ethnic and language communities become literacy teachers and program administrators. Publishers of instructional materials have become increasingly sensitive to cultural bias but, more important, literature by new writers provides a source of reading material that incorporates language and traditions from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Literacy Research

Research projects in adult literacy remain focused primarily on programmatic rather than broader research questions about the nature of literacy in families, communities, and workplaces. Research in the broader area of literacy, which includes linguistics, composition, reading, cognition, and other social science disciplines remains primarily discipline-bound rather than cross-disciplinary; this impedes investigation of the dynamic interactions among social, cultural, linguistic, historical, economic, political, and personal factors that is so urgently needed. In addition, research funding is scarce, funding levels are relatively low, funding often is only for 1 year, dissemination of reports and results is minimal, and review panels for most grant-making change annually, with no attempt to follow a promising line of inquiry or to create a theoretically based research agenda.

However, literacy research in the past decade has moved forward, involving the use of a broader range of research approaches, including qualitative research and practitioner research; a richer set of research questions, some of which are developed directly by practitioners studying their own practice; and a larger number of research settings, most notably families, communities, and workplaces in addition to literacy programs. As a result, a more complex and respectful picture of adults with low literacy abilities is emerg-

ing. It provides important insights into the role of literacy in jobs, communities, and personal lives and into the relationships between culture, native language, prior experience, program context, and literacy. It supports understanding of literacy as practices as we come to learn more about the impact of culture and social setting on defining an individual's literacy ability (see, for example, Horsman 1991; Hunter 1990; Klassen 1991; Parker 1991; Quigley 1992; Weinstein-Shr 1990).

Research is also helping us understand the complexity of literacy practitioners' lives and roles, thereby leading to more appropriate conceptualizations of staff development. We are understanding that teachers as well as learners come to teaching and learning with rich experiences and aspirations that provide a foundation for their work together. Qualitative research methods that examine processes as well as outcomes have great potential for helping us understand their dynamic interaction. However, a number of programs are involved in practitioner research; in addition to providing a new approach to staff development, it adds to the knowledge base of the field (Lytle and Cochran-Smith 1992).

Some researchers have developed productive partnerships with policy makers in specific states, such as Beder with Iowa (see, for example, Beder and Valentine 1987a,b, 1989, 1990; Iowa Department of Education 1992) and Solorzano with the California State Library (1989a,b, 1992). In these rare cases, researchers have been able to pursue a field-based line of inquiry over time, contributing to policy development as well as improved practice.

The National Center for Adult Literacy (NCAL) at the University of Pennsylvania is in the middle of its first 5-year grant, and the National Institute for Literacy funded its first research and development projects in 1992. Although neither institution has a coherent research agenda that is connected to practice and engages the field broadly, each has some specific projects that are exciting and promising, particularly in the areas of staff development and assessment.

Developing and Supporting the Literacy Work Force

A new inquiry-based theoretical model for staff development is emerging that is consistent with viewing literacy as practices and critical reflection and action; it is also learner centered and participatory. However, as long as literacy is viewed as a short-term problem, limited resources will be allocated to long-term staff and organizational development.

Staff Development

Adult literacy education urgently needs well-prepared practitioners who can critically analyze their assumptions about literacy, literacy students, and literacy education, as well as make informed choices about the definitions of literacy on which they base their practice. Adult literacy education does not have the public school system's well-developed infrastructure for initial teacher preparation and ongoing staff development, however. There are far fewer university programs dedicated to helping adult literacy educators improve their practice, there are far fewer resources dedicated to this problem by foundations and corporate giving offices, and there are fewer incentives built into literacy programs themselves; there are rarely salary increases for adult literacy educators who accumulate graduate credits, for example.

Volunteers are the primary instructors in many literacy programs, reflecting the

extent to which there is not a long-term commitment to literacy education. The existence of paid instructors does not ensure a well-prepared work force, however. Most literacy programs with paid teachers still depend on prior training (often as public school teachers) and life experience to guide literacy teachers in their work. Since the majority of the work force is part time, many literacy programs do not pay teachers for participating in staff development activities or reimburse their expenses; it is not unusual for teachers to have to pay for their own substitutes if they wish to attend a workshop during class time. Teachers also are often unaware of the literature in adult literacy education and most do not subscribe to journals. Unfortunately, the 10 or 12 hours of preparation required by most funded and volunteer organizations tend to focus on how to use workbooks, administer tests, and fill in attendance forms rather than on how to think about the issues. This may be followed by episodic, one-shot workshops on a variety of discrete topics. Some programs, however, support ongoing teacher development and support for paid staff and volunteers.

There are clearly competing schools of philosophy about the purposes, processes, and power relationships of staff development in the K-12 literature. The literature in staff development in adult basic education, however, reflects a lack of critical analysis of the assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that are embedded in current staff development practice. The underlying philosophy for staff development is treated as unproblematic in adult literacy education. Discussions of effective staff development practices usually are not placed in the larger framework of program change and increased system effectiveness; nor are they placed in relation to a larger analysis of the role of teachers' knowledge or the power relations that underlie the decision-making processes about staff development needs and structures. Examination of the literature on staff development in adult basic education and in public schools reveals a number of important themes (this is drawn from Fingeret and Cockley 1992 and Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann 1992):

The need for a critical perspective. The literature in staff development in adult basic education reflects a lack of critical analysis of the assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that are embedded in current staff development practice. Although some nontraditional activities may be embraced, such as action research, the larger political, social, and philosophical questions are not raised. Thus, the language of action research and inquiry-based staff development becomes defined within the traditional models rather than defining an alternative paradigm.

The need to problematize the knowledge base in adult literacy. The traditional remedial approach to staff development tends to conceptualize the "knowledge base" as known and content based; the expert is responsible for communicating it to teachers. In an inquiry-based model the knowledge base is problematic rather than known, seeing teachers as generators of knowledge rather than simply as receivers or users.

The need for staff development to be practiced as an ongoing process, generated by teachers and making use of resources in the environment. Teachers involved in staff development may be understood as interacting with the resources in their environment to structure their learning. Staff development has to do with teachers' attitudes to their own growth and development, rather than with the scheduling of workshops, so it is viewed as a continuing process.

The need for community. ABE staff development persists in treating teachers as isolated individuals, even though there is strong evidence that it is extremely effective when staff development efforts develop a sense of community–of being a member of a group with shared values and shared struggles and to which one can contribute as well as learn. Adult literacy education programs are experimenting with a few community-building mechanisms, including study circles in which teachers come together on a regular basis to explore ideas that are of mutual interest (Sherman et al. 1991).

The need for a focus on program improvement. Many authors who discuss public school staff development have moved from focusing on individual teacher improvement to a focus on larger structures–schools or districts. The adult literacy program as an overall environment in which learning and teaching take place is much more invisible in the adult literacy staff development literature, even though the program's culture affects teachers' orientation to their own ongoing learning. In addition, staff development in ABE continues to be oriented almost exclusively to teachers, although there is evidence that administrators often have little or no preparation for their roles (Foster 1990).

Since most adult literacy workers engage in this field as a secondary professional concern (Boshier 1985) and are drawn extensively from the group of public school teachers, it is difficult for literacy workers to come together to focus on their relationship to staff development and to make demands for respect for their experience and knowledge.

Adult literacy staff development traditionally has been approached in ways that are similar to seeing literacy as a set of skills; teacher preparation has been viewed as the accumulation of a sufficiently large "bag of tricks," regardless of programmatic context, and staff development has been viewed as a remediation process in which teachers' skills and knowledge are assessed, gaps identified, and experts called in to fill in the holes.

An alternative model of staff development has been developing in the last decade, mirroring literacy education's concerns with practices, critical reflection, and action. In this model teachers' experience and knowledge are valued and provide the base for continuing inquiry, learning, and action (Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann 1992). This inquiry-based model of staff development uses teacher research as one of its central activities (ibid.). Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990) use the following definition of teacher research: "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 84). They explain:

> By systematic we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. This term also refers to ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analyzing classroom events for which there may be only partial or unwritten records. By intentional we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous, although we do not mean to suggest that important insights about teaching are generated only when planned. . . . By inquiry, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences–to adopt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life. (p. 84)

The extensive literature on teacher research in public schools provides further insight into this area (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1992). In addition, Susan Lytle, at the National Center for Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, has been working with a group of literacy practitioners to adapt the teacher research/inquiry model for adult literacy education. Also, the Office of Adult Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia has recently begun a new statewide inquiry-based staff development project (see Fingeret and Cockley 1992). And the National Institute for Literacy has funded a number of staff development projects that will explore various aspects of practitioner inquiry and staff development.

The goal of practitioner research is not just to conduct research; teacher researchers are committed to solving problems and developing insight into the questions and problems that emerge for them in their own practice. In the process, they may work together for change in the school or in their professional communities. The range of potential outcomes from participation in teacher research, therefore, includes the following (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1992; Goswami and Stillman 1987, cited in Gomez 1988; Lytle and Cochran-Smith 1990, 1991):

- Improved teaching
- Increased activity professionally
- Contributions to the professional literature that provide new insights into teaching and learning
- Organizational and program improvement
- More critical and authoritative use of the research literature
- Increased student motivation as students collaborate with teachers on their projects

Inquiry-based staff development can include a range of activities in addition to teacher research; they are grounded in teachers' knowledge and teachers' questions. Lieberman and Miller (1991) summarize the kind of shift that has to take place in our thinking if we view staff development as inquiry based rather than knowledge based:

> When viewed as inquiry-based action, staff development depends less on expert workshops and more on teacher-led activities, such as study groups, curriculum writing, action research, peer observation, case conferences, program evaluation, trying out new practices, teacher centers, and participation in outside events and organizations. (p. 107)

Change in the approach to staff development requires organizational commitment at all levels–the enthusiasm of administrators as well as teachers. Full engagement in practitioner inquiry can have wide ranging effects, as Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) explain:

> When teacher development is reconfigured as inquiry and teacher research as challenge and critique, they become forms of social change wherein individuals and groups labor to understand and alter classrooms, schools, and school communities. These transformations will inevitably cause conflict as those traditionally disenfranchised begin to play increasingly important roles in generating knowledge and in deciding how it ought to be interpreted and used. . . . As a way of knowing . . .

> teacher research has the potential to alter profoundly the cultures of teaching. (p. 470)

Handbooks, guides, and training curricula for literacy workers continue to abound; most still emphasize transmission of a knowledge base from the trainer to the new teacher. There are some notable exceptions, however. For example, the Commonwealth Literacy Campaign's (1989, 1990) training curricula in Massachusetts are different, however, for their emphasis on process. They provide a series of experiences through which teachers and trainers together discover ways of approaching literacy instruction as tasks, practices, and, to some extent, critical reflection. Gillespie's work (1990) also differs from most materials; she integrates research with experiences to help new teachers understand the theoretical and philosophical base for the exercises. Gillespie also includes a unit on writing, highlighting the relationship between learning to read and write. Cheatham and Lawson (1990) provide more information on group process and the cycle of collaborative small group work. Their model integrates writing fully with reading.

Clarke (1991) focuses on "student-directed group learning" in her handbook for teachers. She provides extensive theoretical background information that emphasizes literacy as critical reflection and action. Clarke shares information and ideas about teaching reading and writing in a critical reflection, participatory group mode. Her work is particularly notable for its chapter on multicultural and class sensitivity, which includes ideas for specific group experiences as well as a theoretical framework for thinking about these issues in the context of learning and teaching.

Wrigley and Guth (1992) integrate a discussion of theory, philosophy, and research with findings from site visits. Their work is informed by a coherent theoretical framework, based on a view of literacy as social practices and critical reflection and action. They provide clear descriptions and guidelines for practice, examples of work being done in programs in the United States, and sample curriculum modules. Although the book is written specifically for ESL literacy practitioners, it offers much to the literacy community at large.

Royce (1991) provides resources to support literacy workers' continuing professional learning. Her guide provides annotated listings of published work in a number of predictable areas, such as "adults as learners" and "evaluation." However, the guide also includes more philosophically related categories such as "diverse populations," "social history and context," and "history, philosophy, and politics." The materials listed in the guide were chosen through a survey process rather than on the basis of a coherent theoretical framework. Nonetheless, there is an attempt to place them in some intellectual context through introductory essays written by a wide selection of authors in adult literacy.

Working Conditions

Working conditions in adult literacy education are difficult at best, further undermining attempts to develop a well-prepared work force in the field. Many teachers are volunteers; most paid jobs remain part time with no benefits and no guarantee of a contract from one 6-month period to the next. Classroom and meeting space is usually borrowed, and access to simple resources such as telephones to call their students and copy machines for developing their own curric-

ulum materials can be very difficult to obtain. In addition, teachers often buy instructional materials with money out of their own pockets, either because their programs do not have money for materials, or the red tape to get access to that money is so long and painstaking that the teachers are intimidated, alienated, or unable to get what they need in a timely manner (Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann 1992).

There is no career path in adult literacy education; the work force tends to be unstable, with high turnover and low involvement in professional development (Foster 1990). Teachers often are geographically isolated, working at satellite sites in public school buildings or community settings such as churches in which they are far from any central program office or the comradeship of fellow literacy workers. This sense of isolation is compounded by the lack of training that could help to connect them to the larger field.

Some literacy program administrators defend their policy of hiring part-time teachers by claiming that this supports flexibility. It allows many classes to be offered at many different sites concurrently, and administrators can stretch their scarce dollars by not paying benefits or professional development expenses. However, this policy also undermines attempts to create a well-prepared, relatively stable work force of teachers who are committed to their own continuing learning and the development of the field.

Work and Literacy

Instructional program development has been dominated by economic rationales in the last decade. Numerous reports claim that the work force of the next decade will not be sufficiently prepared in basic skills to maintain the United States' international economic position (Johnston and Packer 1987). The majority of the workers of the year 2000 already are in the work force; this leads to an emphasis on workplace literacy education. Others are potential workers who presently are supported by public assistance; this leads to welfare reform's attention to education and basic skills development as a mechanism for developing economic self-sufficiency.

Welfare reform's focus on education and the present emphasis on family literacy also address concerns that academically underprepared women as well as children from minority ethnic backgrounds will be major sources of new workers in the future. In addition, the large number of adults who will enter the work force from non-English speaking homes draws attention to ESL instruction. The increasing use of technology in the workplace is underlying much of the concern about the work force's skills; therefore, technology is a focus for instructional innovation. Technology is viewed as a mechanism for delivering instruction as well as providing some of the content for instruction.

The present sense of crisis creates opportunities to develop services that respond to students' situations (at home, at work, and in communities) and characteristics. For the first time some resources are available to help literacy educators develop programs that address literacy as practices and, in some cases, critical reflection and action. In addition, the field is developing alternative approaches to assessment of student progress that are consistent with these views of literacy.

At first glance, the connection between literacy education and work is simple. Employed and unemployed adults are viewed as needing to develop or maintain their skills so that they can remain or become employed, and, possibly, enjoy

some kind of upward mobility. Therefore, the requirements of employment become the major framework for decisions about work-related literacy program curricula. Vocational education, adult basic education, and literacy programs are provided for adults who are about to enter, reenter, or change their place within the work force. Workplace literacy programs are offered to workers who want to maintain or achieve mobility at a particular company.

Complex analyses of work as cognitive practices (for example, Darrah 1991; Scribner 1988) help us understand that the relationship between literacy education and work goes far beyond simple lessons in reading labels on cans or directions for new machines. It has to do with problem solving in the workplace, with literacy as practices, and, in some settings, as critical reflection and action. Work involves social, political, cultural, linguistic, historical, economic, psychological, and interpersonal knowledge and skills–as well as technical knowledge and skills specific to the job. As workplaces become more democratized, it becomes more difficult to separate literacy skills from a worker's ability to use those skills to analyze a situation and respond appropriately.

Recent programs relating literacy and work build on Sticht's (1987) concept of functional context literacy, developed in the military decades earlier. Adults have multiple "functional contexts," such as families, communities, religious organizations, schools, leisure activities, and work. All have aspects that relate to literacy, but only work and, to a lesser extent, family have begun to be explored as a source of curriculum content. As literacy programs focus more on tasks and practices, placing tasks in the contexts of students' lives, curriculum content and instruction must change to reflect more of the richness of students' knowledge, experiences, and interests. Kirsch, Jungeblut, and Campbell (1992) explain:

> Literacy education and training practices must be broadened both within the traditional K-12 school program as well as in continuing education and training programs by focusing on literacy skills associated with the full range of printed or written materials from various adult contexts. This is necessary not only because schools are producing future generations of workers but also because the school model for reading instruction–the model that has resulted in large proportions of adults demonstrating limited literacy skills–is prevalent in many workplace and community education programs. The question is how should existing instructional practices be changed–both behind and beyond the school doors. (p. 10)

However, the use of curriculum that is related to adults' functional contexts does not ensure relevance, meaningfulness, motivation, or effectiveness unless students have participated in decisions about the curricular content, and unless instruction helps students develop the foundation they need to be continuing learners.

Literacy and employment preparation are connected in vocational education, JOBS, and JTPA programs. **Vocational education** is usually offered in public education settings such as vocational and technical high schools, institutes, and colleges, focusing on youth and adults who are about to enter or reenter the work force or who want to change their jobs. Thus, a vocational education course might include an 18-year-old single woman who has worked only part time before, a 42-year-old man with three young children

who is seeking a new job because the local factory that employed him just shut down, and a 55-year-old widow with grown children who just retired from a civil service job and is looking for a way to supplement her retirement check. All three of these adults may be competing for a small number of jobs in the local economy.

Three types of vocational education programs deal with basic skills: integrated, nonintegrated, and combination (Campbell-Thrane 1983, cited in Campbell and Sechler 1987). Integrated programs attempt to combine basic skills and vocational content, whereas nonintegrated programs provide separate instruction in each area and combination programs offer some attempt at integration. "The advantages of the integrated program are distinctly greater for students, their families, and the community because basic skill instruction is job relevant and because more students receive instruction. . . . The major advantages of a nonintegrated program are likely to be experienced by teachers and administrators" (Campbell and Sechler 1987, p. 66). The combination model has the potential to work well because it is tailored to the institution and the students; however, it also may denote a lack of the kinds of fundamental structural changes needed to help students develop basic skills that clearly have a relationship to their desired work lives. Vocational education is responsive to local employers and the local economy. It is consistent with the United States' approach to education in which schooling is isolated from other responses to communities' economic and social issues.

Wider Opportunities for Women has invested in developing model sites in which literacy and employment training for women are combined in community organizations rather than in schools. Their materials (Beck 1990a,b,c) offer some useful information about funding and follow-up; they are slowly moving from instruction based on literacy as skills and tasks to viewing literacy as practices.

Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training is a component of the Family Support Act of 1988; states are required to provide education, training, and employment services that will help recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) become self-sufficient by preparing them for work. Each state retains the authority to decide what these education and training programs look like and what skills they address. However, this kind of coordination among education, training, and employment is new in most states (Chisman and Woodworth 1992):

> In implementing JOBS, states and localities have been asked to develop a comprehensive and integrated system of education, training and job placement from scratch. This has never been attempted in the United States before, and the difficulties states face in attempting it are compounded by the fact that they have been asked to develop such a system for one of the groups in the American population (welfare recipients) that is hardest to serve. (p. 11)

One of the most important early tasks in designing JOBS programs is to move beyond the negative stereotypes of welfare recipients. The literature about JOBS tends to focus on program development and funding, but the Southport Institute (1992) provides a short book of interview quotes from AFDC recipients. Although the quotes are presented piecemeal, organized by topic rather than in the context of people's lives, the book nonetheless provides an important source of

AFDC recipients' wisdom, diversity, and experience.

Chisman and Woodworth point out that choices about employment and remaining on welfare are connected to other issues such as the cost of housing and health care. In addition, increased employment has to do with job availability. They conclude: "Absent a resolution of the nation's problems of job creation and providing universal health care, affordable housing and other necessities, neither JOBS nor JOBS basic education are likely to be very effective in moving large numbers of people from welfare to work" (p. 12).

Working in JOBS programs requires that teachers understand their students' contexts; as one teacher attests:

> Before coming to the program, I was never interested in welfare reform. . . . Now, understanding the welfare system and welfare reform and the relationship of both to my classroom has become an imperative since both define, and often undermine, the goals of my classroom. A program based on faulty assumptions about the economy or the lives of the people whom it serves can be another obstacle in the path of the student. Such a program encourages despair. It does not set the stage for adequate wage employment or the liberation of an individual's potential. (Danberg 1992, p. 11)

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) was designed to link adults with job training, basic skills education, and employment. In areas of high unemployment or where there is massive unemployment due to plant closings, for example, JTPA may set up vocational education programs that respond to the needs of the local economy and the work force's needs and interests. In other areas, JTPA may serve as a mechanism to channel adults into existing programs. JTPA programs are evaluated primarily on the basis of their placement records. A high percentage of JTPA participants have very low literacy skills (Kirsch, Jungeblut, and Campbell 1992), and JTPA's regulations are under revision because of criticisms that it has been working with those who will be the easiest to place and for whom short-term interventions will yield the largest rewards (Cheverton 1992). Following a review of the research concerning JTPA, Cheverton concludes:

> The JTPA system must take steps to ensure that its structure, attitude and policies enhance the long-term employability of its clients, and do not prevent it. First, JTPA professionals on all levels must create and take advantage of opportunities to educate themselves and the business community on the issues related to second chance employment and training. . . . Second, service providers can assist employers in developing effective skill development and maintenance programs for their companies to expand job opportunities for less-skilled workers. . . . Third, JTPA staff training must include topics other than "How to Complete This Form." Instead, training must help staff understand the causes of unemployment and offer new ways that JTPA can address those causes. (pp. 15-16)

The effectiveness of employment-related basic skills programs remains controversial. For example, Merrifield, Norris, and White (1991) conducted an indepth study of a group of women who lost their jobs and participated in JTPA training to

help them become reemployed. They find that even after training, displaced workers often faced decreased wage levels, personal and family problems, and an inability to qualify for jobs that require longer periods of training and more extensive financial assistance. Some adults had to prepare for and take General Educational Development (GED) tests in order to enter job training programs; in some cases their GED study used up their JTPA benefits before they were able to move on to job training.

Another indepth study of vocational education also finds discrepancies between the promises of such programs and workers' experiences. Hull (n.d.) concludes:

> The popular rhetoric which attempts to blame economic difficulties on unskilled labor, and then attempts to remedy the problem with literacy programs and ever proliferating sets of workbooks and computer-aided instruction on basic skills, simply misses the mark . . . something is curiously and deeply wrong here. People enter a training program which emphasizes skills that won't be used on the job, are given an employment test that requires skills that have questionable relevance to work, are hired despite doing poorly on the test and the interview, and lose their jobs even when they are competent at doing the work. The problem is much more complicated than a deficit in skills and its solution much more difficult than devising a new skills-building program or providing workplace literacy instruction. (p. 54)

The present JTPA and vocational education programs can be successful only to the extent that jobs exist in the community, that the local economy is healthy, and that there is a match between workers' interests, employers' interests, and educational programs.

An alternative model of employment preparation places education and training in the context of students' lives and their communities. Rather than preparing students for jobs that are defined by others, these programs help individuals and communities create new jobs and new employment preparation in relation to community development and individual empowerment (Center for Working Life 1991; Training and Development Resources 1990). This kind of work combines literacy education and community economic development. It requires personnel with a broad range of knowledge and skills that go far beyond those found in traditional vocational education programs; there are few such programs.

Literacy and employment enhancement are linked in **workplace literacy programs** that attempt to integrate instruction in literacy skills with job-related content (for example, Chase 1990). However, there are problems in developing this kind of contextual curriculum (U.S. Department of Education 1992c). Some employers do not want job-specific materials made public through their use as curriculum. In other cases, employers and, sometimes, educators and training personnel, do not understand that curriculum development involves using workplace materials to teach adults how to engage in literacy practices–not simply how to complete literacy tasks successfully.

In addition, functional context approaches to curriculum development usually do not examine the functions of literacy in the workplace culture, the norms around using text and literacy, and the ways that literacy is used to maintain boundaries or status differences. Also, functional context approaches do not place the work-

place in the broader setting of the community; this limits our understanding of how literacy is related to political relationships (Gowen 1992) and, therefore, limits the extent to which workplace literacy can be approached as critical reflection and social action. Gowen suggests ethnographic research, in which social change is viewed as one of the purposes of literacy education, as an alternative to the functional context approach. She explains that the activities may appear to be similar, but there are underlying theoretical differences between the two approaches:

> For those readers hopeful that workplace literacy might serve as a catalyst for social and economic change, it is important to consider the broader contexts in which these programs are situated. One way to develop this broader understanding is to use ethnographic techniques to develop an interpretive understanding of the ecology of literacy: the values and uses of language and text in the lives of all the participants in the project. . . . [In a functional context approach] one assumes there is a portable toolbox of basic skills that is embedded in job tasks and that can be uncovered, made explicit, and then taught to all employees. . . . In an ethnographic approach, on the other hand, one is looking for an understanding of the ways literacy is socially constructed within and across the various groups that constitute the community of workers in a specific workplace. (p. 130)

This means that, in addition to observing and interviewing all of the participants in a workplace about the functions of text and literacy, the researcher also observes the norms around the uses of text and literacy and the ways that literacy is connected to the social structure of the workplace. In addition, the workplace and the workers are placed in the context of their communities.

Curriculum must be understood as a process as well as a product (U.S. Department of Education 1992b). Curriculum development is ongoing as the work process and workers' relationship to their work evolve. The process of curriculum development can also provide a context for redefining the relationship between workers and employers (Chisman 1992) if both are partners in identifying appropriate content and developing materials.

Policy analysts and employers have been concerned about the literacy skills required by new technology in the workplace, and this has provided the rationale for many workplace literacy programs. The relationship between learning to use new technology, actually using it, and literacy skills has been only minimally investigated, however. Recent research commissioned by the Office of Technology Assessment (Center for Literacy Studies 1992) claims that adults with low literacy skills are often able to learn how to use new technology when allowed to learn in the way that they learn best: watching, questioning, and listening to someone who already knows how to use it, rather than reading a manual or attending a formal class. And it is not clear that operating new machinery requires additional literacy skills; the tasks are often formulaic, repetitive, and predictable. Much more research is needed in this area.

Workplace literacy is often approached as a remediation process; the work environment is seen as the source of criteria for effective functioning and workers' skills are assessed against this framework. A few authors, however, are trying to understand how workplace literacy can be more

developmentally oriented, supporting workers' learning and growth in a positive way rather than through a deficit model. For example, Foucar-Szocki (1992) assessed the implementation of the American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) **Workplace Basics** program in two medium and small companies. She concludes that its effectiveness is tied to using it as the foundation for a broader employee development system in which the complex relationship between skills and job performance is explored and that employees' contributions to the organization's health are as important as identifying skills areas to be developed further. Other authors (such as Faison et al. 1992) conclude that workplace literacy programs must be part of broader workplace education programs that are available to everyone in a workplace; the program should be viewed as employee development rather than as remediation.

Workplace programs that are designed around workers' needs and interests rather than placing the workplace as central to instruction are known as "worker centered," similar to "learner-centered" literacy (Sarmiento and Kay 1990). Worker-centered workplace literacy programs approach literacy as tasks, practices, and, sometimes, as critical reflection and action. They can encourage collective action particularly when they are sponsored by unions (ibid.). The major characteristics of worker-centered learning draw from the principles of learner-centered literacy; they include the following (ibid.):

1. Worker-centered learning builds on what workers already know.

2. Worker-centered learning addresses the needs of the whole person.

3. Workers and their unions are active in developing and planning these programs.

4. Decision making is a participatory process.

5. Workers have equal access to programs in their workplace.

6. Curriculum content and program structure reflect the diverse learning styles and needs of adult workers.

7. Workers are involved in helping to design any tests or assessments.

8. Classroom records are confidential.

9. Literacy programs may be integrated into a larger strategy for responding to anticipated changes in the workplace. (pp. 26-27)

Sarmiento and Kay also explain that worker-centered programs often include attention to tasks and practices other than those that are directly related to jobs; goals such as self-improvement and community participation and development are legitimate and viable.

Gowen (1992) presents an indepth case study of a hospital workplace literacy program in which she illustrates the consequences of developing a program without respecting the learners' culture and perspective. She also locates the source of this approach in the culture and beliefs of those responsible for developing the program:

> In the King Memorial project, workplace literacy is conceived as a narrowly defined solution to a wide range of problems. It overlooks the social and political contexts of the lives of entry-level workers and interprets their be-

haviors as signs of poor literacy and problem-solving skills. This, in turn, serves to both justify and perpetuate their positions as entry-level workers. . . . Entry-level workers are characterized as confused, incapable of problem solving, parenting, or performing with competence on the job. The ways that these women and men actually do live in the world belie these myths. (pp. 131-132)

Gowen claims that the program may be oriented to socializing workers into the mainstream culture rather than increasing literacy skills–a claim that has been made about literacy programs in other contexts as well (see, for example, Auerbach 1989; Fingeret 1983). Adults' resistance to such pressure is understandable (see also Quigley 1991). Gowen continues:

> When literacy providers uncritically accept this agenda [of mainstreaming] and focus only on skills, little significant long-term change will occur. A more productive approach would be to adopt a participatory model of workplace education. This model would invite all stakeholders to the table to mutually determine both the problem and its possible solutions. . . . By necessity, this model will create new ways for participants to see their situations. And it calls upon the literacy educator to abandon the role of expert and to assume the role of facilitator–to abandon notions of deficit and to search instead for the abilities already constituted in workers but often unrecognized by institutions or assessment measures. (pp. 132-133)

Workplace literacy programs often involve a partnership among educational providers, businesses, unions, and workers. This can create communication problems and can create a lack of clarity about who is responsible for specific aspects of the educational program. A report of a conference of directors of National Workplace Literacy demonstration projects (U.S. Department of Education 1992b) concludes that educators and businesses "are engaged in transforming the culture of the workplace. When the three cultures of business, labor, and education come together, they create a new culture. It is not clear what this new culture looks like; it varies in each workplace" (p. 11). The report also discusses the ways in which building partnerships is a process that requires flexibility and, often, learning new skills.

In addition, workplace literacy programs are grappling with appropriate evaluation criteria. Since they tend to be concerned with literacy as practices–improving job performance in some way–assessment must move away from standardized tests. At the same time, however, productivity is often not a useful measure. Many work-related workplace literacy programs prepare for future equipment or procedural changes designed to boost productivity for the plant overall rather than for individuals; others address morale or teamwork issues that are not reflected in measures of personal productivity.

Support for Work and Literacy Programs

The literature regarding literacy and work consistently calls for more training and technical assistance resources (see for example, Campbell and Sechler 1987; Foucar-Szocki 1992; Merrifield, Norris, and White 1991; U.S. Department of Education 1992b,c). A report of a conference of workplace literacy program

directors elaborates (U.S. Department of Education 1992b):

> There was general agreement that workplace education teachers would benefit greatly from a systematic orientation and training program. Teaching in a workplace education program is demanding work and requires many different skills–teaching skills, curriculum development skills, managerial skills, interpersonal skills, even, according to one participant, "the skills of a cultural anthropologist." . . . The range would appear more manageable if offset by an orientation and training program for new staff, along with ongoing training, teacher-sharing, and inservice staff development for veteran staff. (p. 29)

Responses are emerging. For example, Chisman (1992) proposes a training and support system for work force literacy that is similar to the cooperative extension service, although he does not include a critical appraisal of the training content and process. The Business Council for Effective Literacy in New York City provides information resources and referrals as well as a newsletter that addresses issues and disseminates information about corporate involvement in literacy education.

The Center for Working Life's Worklife Education Resource Center (WERC) in Oakland, California, provides more indepth assistance:

> Information, resources and technical assistance to work-centered education programs that will enable the current work force to remain active and productive as workers, family members and citizens as we move into the next century. The Center was designed specifically to serve unions, community colleges and small businesses who have limited resources and experience in establishing training and education programs. WERC is concerned with broad issues of work-based education ranging from literacy, adult basic education, ESL and skills upgrading to health and safety programs, advanced education and learning for personal enrichment. (p. 10)

Sticht, McDonald, and Huie (1992) are piloting an approach in California that is designed to develop work force education and lifelong learning specialists who will work in Action Research Centers located in communities and connected to workplaces, community organizations, and educational institutions. This project hopes to link progressive graduate education that includes attention to such areas as action research and literacy as practices with literacy organization staff development needs and employers' and communities' program development interests.

A number of print materials have been developed to assist those who wish to develop workplace literacy programs (for example, Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer 1990; Philippi 1991). Wider Opportunities for Women (Sticht and Lancaster 1992) offers a guide for developing functional context education programs that provides an overview of the theoretical and research base for this approach. Most of these guides do not examine the underlying values or assumptions implicit in their models.

One of the most accessible and interactive guides was developed by the Commonwealth Literacy Campaign: ***Education in the Workplace*** (Sperazi 1991), a handbook for "planning adult basic skills programs in small business and industry." Many

handbooks and references on setting up workplace programs have been written, but this one is notable for its attention to cultural diversity, inclusion of research findings in a way that makes them relevant and accessible, emphasis on developing an inclusive planning process rather than simply following a set of steps, short case studies, and extensive lists of resources. Although written for Massachusetts, it is much more broadly applicable.

The majority of materials relating work and education remain based in theory more than in experience and practice. They recognize the need for assistance in developing good programs combining work and literacy, but, with notable exceptions, they do not explore the issues raised by such recommendations that relate to staff and organizational development and to the definitions of literacy that are incorporated into workplace literacy programs. Much of the literature treats the definition of literacy as nonproblematic, overlooking the differences between teaching literacy as skills, tasks, and practices and almost never touching on the notion of literacy as critical reflection and action in relation to workplaces. In addition, the literature rarely acknowledges that at times the goals and purposes of workers participating in workplace literacy programs differ from those of their employers.

The literature also tends to ignore ethical questions that arise in workplace literacy and vocational education, such as those raised by Darrah (1991). Workplace literacy and vocational education are not value neutral. By helping businesses become more profitable and helping workers become more productive, literacy educators have to take responsibility for the nature of the products, the workplaces, and the work practices that are being supported. In creating vocational education programs, educators have to take some responsibility for the relationship of such programs to the community's economic situation.

Materials are needed to help educators and others involved in work force literacy think through the ethical issues. Also needed are more indepth case studies of workplace education and workplace literacy to help us understand the complex dynamics of partnerships among educators, employers, workers, and unions. The existing literature, although meager, provides some useful insights (such as Faison et al. 1992; Foucar-Szocki 1992; Sperazi 1991). Particularly needed is more access to the perspectives of the groups involved; a series of action research projects in which workers, employers, and educators investigate their own experience and come together to write their stories would be quite useful.

The most important recent work in this area is Gowen's (1992) ethnographic study of a workplace literacy program at King Memorial Hospital. Gowen places functional context literacy education and workplace literacy education in larger social and historical frameworks, and she examines the history and culture of King Memorial Hospital similarly. She explicitly explores racism, classism, and sexism in the culture of the hospital as well as how they become factors in the literacy program. Gowen explores the relationship between the perspectives of hospital staff, program staff, and workers, helping readers to understand that assumptions and beliefs about students' strengths and deficits are connected to the larger cultural environment, and they reverberate through the curriculum and the instructional program. Gowen raises crucial issues about the ways in which workplace literacy programs can function as new avenues for social control on the part of management, and for resistance on the part of workers.

Literacy Skills for Women and Families

Literacy educators and policy makers have focused on women and families as a second arena for responding to the concern about the work force of the future. This is seen in attention to family and intergenerational literacy education, welfare reform and the JOBS programs, programs for homeless persons, and programs emphasizing women and their preparation for the work force (for example, Wider Opportunities for Women). These programs try to help women get or keep their jobs and develop relationships with their children that support children's school success.

Family and intergenerational literacy programs are based on the finding that parents' educational attainment is a strong predictor of children's schooling success. Therefore, improving parents' skills should enhance their children's chances of success. These programs also attempt to reflect the understanding that adults belong to family and community systems; their needs often can be met most effectively by working with the system rather than by trying to separate people from their networks. Family literacy programs also tend to support the idea that children will be most successful in school when the values and activities in the home are congruent with those they encounter in school. Furthermore, family literacy programs respond to the well-documented fact that many adults come to literacy programs because of a concern with their relationship to their children. They may want to read to their children, help their children with schoolwork, enhance their own image in their children's eyes, or model behaviors consistent with valuing schooling. Family literacy programs can also strengthen families by recognizing the role of literacy in cultural transmission, particularly in cultural communities that feel threatened (Weinstein-Shr forthcoming), such as minority ethnic and language communities.

Intergenerational literacy programs are broader than family literacy, since the participants, while representing different generations, are not necessarily family members. Family literacy programs all include members of different generations (Lancaster 1992). Intergenerational and family literacy programs can come in many forms (see, for example, Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center [ILRDC] 1990; Lancaster 1992; Nickse 1990a,b); they include programs that work with adults primarily (and children to a lesser extent), with children primarily (and adults to a lesser extent), and with children and adults together. Many intergenerational programs that work with adults provide some group activity in which parents have a chance to talk to each other about raising children and balancing the competing demands of family, job, and civic involvement. Family literacy programs such as the publicly funded Even Start program also provide a structure in many communities for bringing together adult literacy and public school educators–something that was long overdue. However, Nickse (1990b) warns that family and intergenerational programs are not the cure-all:

> There is a danger at this point that expectations for the success of family and intergenerational literacy programs will exceed our experience with administering them. Again, there are no "quick fixes" in literacy improvement, nor do these programs cost less to run in the short term. Over the years, however, a more holistic family and community approach to literacy improvement may prove cost-saving to the country and of greatest value to adults and children. (p. 29)

Family literacy programs begin with a structure (involving parents and their young children) rather than a focus on substance. There may be some specific content identified with a "parenting education" component; as with many parenting education programs, however, that content is usually decided upon by experts without input from the learners. The rest of the program tends to reflect the current state of practice associated with the regular literacy programs offered by the same organization (Chisman and Woodworth, 1992). That means that if the sponsoring literacy program uses workbooks that address literacy as a set of discrete skills, the family literacy component will usually do the same thing.

In addition, many family literacy programs are narrowly oriented to bringing school behaviors into the home rather than building on the family's existing cultural background and bringing that into the program (Auerbach, 1989). Family literacy has not necessarily provided an impetus for educators to learn to develop task, practice, and critical reflection types of literacy programs.

Family literacy also tends to focus on the relationship between literacy and schooling, especially for children. There is a need for more emphasis to be placed on the functions of literacy in the family, including the ways in which literacy abilities are related to issues such as communication, power and, in some cases, survival (see Weinstein-Shr forthcoming).

However, some programs are moving toward a more participatory model, as illustrated in an evaluation conducted by the ILRDC (1992):

> The participatory nature of family education was an increasingly important guiding philosophy for the model sites. Most program coordinators were experimenting with or discussing how to increase participants' control over their education. Three concepts were particularly important for these model sites: programmatic responsiveness to family and individual needs, activities built on and around family strengths rather than deficits, and encouragement and acceptance of individual and family control of learning. (p. 7)

Auerbach's (1990) guide describes a participatory curriculum development process that involves students in creating curriculum that respects their cultures and language backgrounds and builds on their strengths. The variety of program structures in family and intergenerational literacy programs implies the need for flexible evaluation design that responds to the range of program goals, approaches, and purposes. Although much of the literature calls for multiple components in family and intergenerational literacy programs, the effectiveness of these components and their interaction is not well understood (Popp 1991; Solorzano and Baca 1991).

Educational programs for homeless persons also focus on employability and self-sufficiency; although developed specifically for homeless persons, many of these programs nonetheless incorporate assumptions from literacy programs for other populations. For example, Sperazi et al. (1990) evaluated programs for homeless persons in Massachusetts. They assert that it is important to remember that "homeless people are not all the same" although there is a "shared experience of disconnection" (p. 3). They illustrate problems with traditional ways of conducting adult education programs that assume stable communities, homes, and resources to support program involvement (such as child care, transportation, paper and

pencils, books). Their report contains case studies that illustrate some of the approaches possible for working with homeless persons in a variety of contexts.

Partnerships between educators and shelter providers are central to literacy work with homeless persons. Problems arise in these partnerships that are similar to those that arise in workplace literacy partnerships; organizations are coming together across different cultures and must learn to work together at the administrative level and at the level of direct services (Sperazi et al. 1990). Adults usually participate over a short period of time and have goals that often are very specific. Therefore, evaluation and assessment must be designed so that they are appropriate these circumstances.

Other literacy programs try to create a stable student body that will complete some set of learning goals. Programs for homeless persons, however, work with adults for 30-90 days. They cannot realistically expect to attain major advances in skills or in the ability to engage in new practices over that short time. However, programs for homeless persons can try to facilitate transition to programs in the community as adults become more self-sufficient and leave the shelter. This means that adults in the shelter programs need to have a positive experience and need to understand the relationship between improving their literacy practices and their other goals. Thus, shelter programs are focused differently from other literacy programs; success is transition (Sperazi et al. 1990).

Many of the programs associated with welfare reform, family literacy, and literacy for homeless persons focus particularly on women. This concern is certainly welcome, for women historically have been undereducated and marginalized. However, there is always the danger that these literacy programs may serve to domesticate women further, preparing them to continue their roles as primary caretakers of their children and as low-wage workers. This may not be consistent with women's aspirations. For example, Horsman (1991) finds that–

> many of the women interviewed spoke about the importance of the challenge of an educational program and the search for meaning in their lives: They wanted something in their minds "besides the everyday." Yet the main focus of many of the programs was on "functioning" and basic skills for their everyday lives. (p. 226)

Literacy education for women that focuses on literacy as critical reflection and action has the potential to help women develop a critical perspective on their lives and their roles and to use their developing literacy skills to work together to change their conditions. As Stromquist (1992) explains:

> If literacy for women does not bring with it an emancipatory content and participatory methods of instruction, there is a greater danger that the state may be using literacy not to release women from subordinate positions but to indoctrinate them more effectively with asymmetrical gender relations. (p. 65)

Assessment of Student Learning and Program Evaluation

The development of innovative, effective approaches to instruction must be accompanied by parallel advances in assessment. Experts agree (Farr and Carey 1986; Lytle and Wolfe 1989; Sticht 1990) that there should be congruence between learner

assessment and instruction. They should be philosophically consistent and should reflect the same definitions of literacy and the purposes of literacy programs. For example, the effectiveness of a community-based literacy program that is oriented to literacy as practices and involves learners in real-world collaborative work on community issues will not be adequately reflected by grade-level scores on a standardized test that treats literacy as a set of discrete skills.

Assessment can be approached in a number of ways. Soifer et al. (1990) present a grid relating assessment methods and purposes. Program evaluation is equally diverse. This section explores some of the prevailing approaches in each area and examines the underlying issues.

Standardized Tests

Standardized tests traditionally have been used for assessment because they are easy to administer to groups of students and they require minimal training on the part of teachers. They provide easily aggregated information that can be used to place students in a program and to place students in relation to their own prior performance and in relation to other students' performance (Ehringhaus 1991). An extensive review of test instruments is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation (Jackson 1990).

However, standardized tests also present major problems. The nature of standardization is in conflict with literacy education that defines literacy as practices and critical reflection and action. It does not allow for literacy as a process of constructing meaning, but rather tests whether an adult performs tasks in ways that are consistent with norms (Ehringhaus 1991). Many standardized tests rely on grade levels as a measuring device, although grade levels really have no meaning in the world of adult literacy–they are based on controlled vocabulary and sentence structure found in elementary school reading programs. Standardized tests place the authority for judging progress outside the learner and teacher, sometimes undermining a program's efforts to encourage teachers and learners to take more control over the instructional process, gearing it directly to students' goals and basing it on students' prior knowledge and strengths. Ehringhaus (1991) cautions that multiple-choice tests, when used as the sole assessment of student learning, have serious problems:

> Students learn that programs and teachers value their ability to identify correctly "a," "b," or "c" rather than their ability to write a letter, debate an issue, or use information from a book. Furthermore, teachers receive the questionable message that reading and writing are separate entities comprised of a series of hierarchically arranged subskills. These messages reflect social values and, ultimately, translate into program goals. An emphasis on standardized testing trivializes the broader goals of assessment and permits–or encourages–easily measurable objectives even when they are restrictive and do not represent learners' goals. (p. 153)

In addition, most standardized tests (except for ETS's instruments and their derivative Test of Adult Literacy Skills published by Simon and Schuster) provide a single score, although we know that literacy abilities vary with the type of skill, type of task, and type of setting in which the task will be accomplished. Also, test scores may not change (or change may be negative) because students approach the

test differently as they develop their skills. Sticht (1990) explains:

> It is possible . . . that negative gain may occur because learners on the pre-test do not work at any given item too long, because they think they cannot perform the test task, and so they simply guess at all the items. On the post-test they spend more time on each item because they have new competence and think they should not guess but try to actually comprehend and perform each item. This could lead to more accurate, but fewer test items being completed at the post-test, and hence a negative gain score. (p. 21)

Standardized tests, by allowing for only one right answer to multiple-choice items, also undermine the message communicated by literacy programs that approach literacy as social practices in the real world:

> Sometimes it is a struggle for learners to see the relationship between a multifaceted curriculum and progress as determined by a standardized test. . . . Still further, the format of standardized tests as collections of passages with questions that have single right answers demonstrates a view of reading that denies the possibility of multiple readings of texts or of texts read for a variety of purposes. (Lytle and Wolfe 1989, p. 45)

Sternberg (1990) reinforces this assertion: "IQ tests, achievement tests, and academic problems tend to be well-structured. There is a path, and if you follow that path, you're guaranteed a solution. . . . Despite the fact that test problems and most academic problems are well-defined, very few real-world problems are defined" (p. 37). Farr and Carey (1986), writing on reading measurement for the International Reading Association, further claim that–

> one of the major problems with the multiple choice format is the insistence on a single correct answer. Recent research has emphasized that reading comprehension is a constructive process and that meaning is as dependent on the reader as it is on the test. Thus, the single correct answer format provides a dilemma for authors of multiple choice tests. Even if a particular answer is agreed upon by a committee of experts, the possibility exists that a creative reader is capable of going beyond conventional implications of the passage to infer a response that is incorrect when measured against the single response anticipated and allowed. (p. 34)

Standardized tests reinforce the message that literacy is an individual act that depends on individual skill attainment, rather than viewing literacy as a social practice that often reflects the collaborative nature of life and learning. In addition, some teachers believe that formal testing "discriminates against students with special learning needs or language differences and leads to serious affective problems for some students" (Ehringhaus 1991, p. 150).

Participatory Assessment

Participatory assessment (Lytle and Wolfe 1989) provides an alternative to traditional assessment models. It is consistent with viewing literacy as practices and critical reflection and action. Lytle and Wolfe describe it as "a process rather than a tool or set of tools, distinguished from other assessment approaches by its view

of literacy and literacy education and by its emphasis on the active participation of both adult learners and program staff" (p. 51). "Participatory assessment, then, necessitates a collaborative relationship among learners and program staff in determining the goals, texts, and contexts of assessment, as well as in judging its outcomes" (p. 52). This is a view of assessment that is consistent with understanding that literacy practices and goals vary from student to student.

Public school education has an extensive literature exploring related topics such as authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, and the relationship between alternative assessment and school improvement. These topics are almost nonexistent in adult literacy education literature, with notable exceptions (such as Lytle and Wolfe 1989; Lytle et al. 1989). Approaches to participatory assessment seem to share an emphasis on communication between teachers and students, shared control over the assessment process, and multiple indicators of students' learning and growth. Participatory assessment usually begins with a conversation between the students and the teacher or tutor in which the students talk about their goals, interests, skills, and backgrounds. This becomes the beginning of an ongoing conversation in which students and teachers discuss learning and the direction of instruction, as well as collecting samples of students' work and examples of new tasks and practices. In addition, the participatory assessment process can include classroom group discussions about how students know they are learning, providing opportunities for students to give each other feedback about their progress and growth.

Many public school educators advocate developing portfolios for assessment, and a number of adult literacy educators are experimenting with portfolios now (see, for examples, McGrail 1992). Valencia (1990), writing from the perspective of public schools, asserts that there are four basic principles for a portfolio:

1. The tasks reflected or included in the portfolio should be "authentic," reflecting students' goals and the tasks and practices in which students engage;

2. The portfolio should be integrated into instruction and updated continually; it should reflect students' developmental process as well as products;

3. There should be a sampling of a wide range of processes, activities, practices, and tasks to correspond to the variety of ways in which literacy skills are used; and

4. Students and teachers should work together developing and assessing the portfolio. (p. 338)

Portfolios may include records of the books and magazines students read; notes from student-teacher conferences about goals and progress; students' notes about their progress and reflection on the new literacy practices in which they now engage; writing samples that cover a period of time; and test scores if the program requires some kind of testing. All of these pieces of evidence are assessed on a regular basis by the teacher and the student who work together to try to understand the dynamic relationship between program participation, learning, and changes in students' lives.

Wolf (1989) admits that portfolio assessment is not an easy route to take:

> Portfolios are messy. They demand intimate and often frighteningly subjective talk with students. Portfolios are work.

> Teachers who ask students to read their own progress in the "footprints" of their works have to coax and bicker with individuals who are used to being assessed. Halfway through the semester, at least a half dozen recalcitrants will lose every paper or sketch or tape they have ever owned. More important, teachers have to struggle to read and make sense of whole works and patterns of growth. Hence, hard questions arise: "Why bother? What comes out of portfolio-based assessment?" The immediate answer lies in integrity and the validity of the information we gain about how and what students learn. But that's far from all. (p. 37)

Wolf goes on to list the other outcomes of working with portfolios: enhancing student responsibility, enlarging students' and teachers' views of what is being learned, providing systematic opportunities for a process orientation and a developmental perspective on learning and teaching.

Participatory assessment is gaining credence and there is increasing interest in the field. Even practitioners who approach literacy as skills and discrete tasks feel that present standardized tests do not meet their needs. It is important to note, however, that alternatives to standardized tests are not necessarily participatory. It is possible to develop alternative indicators of student progress, including writing and checklists in portfolios, that are evaluated solely by the teacher. Participatory assessment is a process that is based on mutual respect and dialogue; it is much more than an accumulation of indicators of progress other than standardized tests.

Program Evaluation

Adult literacy educators have made notable progress in developing alternative assessment strategies; however, the relationship between individual student assessment and larger program evaluation processes remains a problem. This issue has increased in importance because the National Literacy Act requires that states develop indicators of program quality for use in evaluating program effectiveness; the federal government released a model set of indicators in 1992 (U.S. Department of Education 1992a).

In many program evaluations, test scores are aggregated to make claims about program effectiveness (that is, how many grade levels do students increase their scores per 100 hours of instruction). This does not identify which aspects of the program contribute to or hinder student progress, and it focuses on student performance rather than program performance as an indicator of program effectiveness (Stein forthcoming).

When programs use test score data as a measure of program effectiveness, despite our understanding of tests' real limitations, they may make inappropriate claims. For example, when computing gains per 100 hours, researchers tend to project, assuming a linear relationship. Thus, if students have been in the program for 20 hours and gained .3 grade level equivalents on a test, the researcher might present this conclusion as 1.5 grade level gain per 100 hours, multiplying each figure by 5. However, a number of researchers contend that studies have shown a very low correlation between hours of attendance and mean reading gains (Association for Community Based Education 1989; Fingeret and Danin 1991; Sticht 1990), and the relationship usually is not linear. These figures, therefore, are quite suspect.

Standardized tests and similar kinds of accountability measures are also problematic because they push for standardization in a field that requires diversity. Beder (1991) warns that "standardized criteria for accountability will require standardized program goals and methods of operating. In the long run, adult literacy education might lose its very vitality" (p. 152). Measures for program accountability cannot be separated from program operations; instruction will tend to develop so that it is compatible with the ways in which success is measured. It is important to remain focused on the underlying philosophy of instruction and theory of literacy that is guiding literacy efforts. Accountability mechanisms must be designed so that they are consistent with these values and beliefs, rather than simply to generate numbers that fit easily into formulae.

More holistic, qualitative local program evaluations (such as Albert and D'Amico-Samuels 1991; Darkenwald and Silvestri 1992; Fingeret and Danin 1991) portray the complexity of program operation and the impact for students who participate. These studies are important for their insights into the relationships between program participation and learners' perceptions of changes in their lives. For example, Albert and D'Amico-Samuels are conducting a longitudinal study of the impact of participation for adults in New York City's programs. Although the Literacy Assistance Center maintains a database that answers questions about the level of program involvement and progress on standardized measures, Albert and D'Amico-Samuels' interviews help us understand the meaning of these data in terms of changes in learners' literacy practices.

Fingeret and Danin (1991) conducted an indepth study of the impact of participation for students in Literacy Volunteers of New York City. They were particularly concerned with the impact of new literacy skills on students' lives–on their literacy practices. Fingeret and Danin wanted to move beyond listing changes in practices to try to understand why some students developed some new literacy practices but not others. For example, it was not unusual to find that students began paying their bills with checks they could write at home, but did not pay with checks at the grocery store. Fingeret and Danin developed a way of conceptualizing impact that addresses literacy as practices inside and outside the program. Among their conclusions, they find that students are slow to use new abilities in ways that cross the boundary between inside and outside the program.

Fingeret and Danin's work underlines the importance of assessment and evaluation focusing on practices. If the purpose of literacy education is to help learners use their new skills to accomplish new tasks in their lives, we cannot assume that filling in worksheets in class implies helping children with their homework at home.

Unfortunately, many evaluation studies do not document instructional practices, making it difficult to connect changes in literacy abilities to program participation. Fingeret and Danin's program evaluation in New York City contains rich observation data, and it also documents the ways in which students make connections between specific instructional practices and their ability to engage in new literacy practices. For example, students speak forcefully about the impact of group instruction, the impact of volunteer turnover, and the impact of a writing-based instructional approach. The study helps program administrators, teachers, and students plan for the future as well as reflect on the successes and limitations of the past.

Lytle and Wolfe (1989) provide an overview of the issues in literacy assessment and program evaluation, as well as a summary of the responses found in the field. They summarize the critical features of adult literacy program evaluation this way (pp. 60-68):

1. Program evaluation in adult literacy education should be conducted both externally and internally.

2. Program evaluation should be both formative and summative.

3. Program evaluation and learner assessment should involve learners and staff in a participatory process.

4. Questions for the design of program evaluation should be generated from theory, research, evaluation, and program practice.

5. Program evaluation should involve critical reflection on program philosophy and goals.

6. Program evaluation should give prominence to the processes of teaching and learning.

7. Evaluations should be designed to capture a range of learner and program outcomes.

8. Program evaluation and learner assessment require a variety of methods for collecting data over time.

9. To the extent possible, program evaluation and learner assessment should be integrated with program functions.

10. Program evaluation should be systematic and systemic, enabling stakeholders to make comparisons within and across programs and contexts.

Community-oriented literacy programs must approach evaluation by involving the larger community as well as the program participants. Community-oriented programs approach literacy in a contextualized way, focusing on practices and critical reflection and action. It is particularly important that community-oriented programs develop measures of quality that reflect these dimensions. The Association for Community Based Education (Stein forthcoming) has developed a framework for assessing the quality of community-based literacy programs that helps practitioners imagine new ways of measuring, or documenting, change.

Large-Scale Evaluation

In addition to individual local program evaluations, some states have conducted a broad evaluation of statewide programs (Fingeret 1985; Fingeret and Cockley 1992; Iowa Department of Education 1992; Solorzano and Baca 1991). Iowa's survey study of GED graduates (1992) is notable for its inclusion of adults who completed their GED as many as 10 years ago. This study makes strong claims about the positive benefit of a GED, but also cautions that it is not definitive, since it cannot separate the impact of the GED from other social and economic factors during the period studied.

Finally, there are a number of national studies conducted for the federal government to examine specific types of programs such as English as a second language (Wrigley and Guth 1992), teacher training for programs (Sherman et al. 1991), and an overview of the adult education programs nationally (Development Associates 1992). These studies are usually presented as atheoretical, providing a snapshot of present practice. A notable exception is the work by Wrigley and Guth, which takes an explicit stand

on the importance of approaching literacy as practices and critical reflection and action; it assesses program practices within that framework.

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) also conducted a national evaluation of their work (Lawson et al. 1990). The study served as an impetus to develop and implement data collection systems that would serve local programs as well as provide national-level data. A national program profile was developed and more indepth data were collected from six sites in a pilot study. The report claims that LVA programs are effective and that students learn more in direct proportion to the time they spend in programs. However, these claims are accompanied by a major caveat:

> The results of the pilot study demonstrate clearly that even these selected programs' data collection and record keeping processes are not sufficient to enable LVA to identify with certainty the conditions that exist when a learner is successful or unsuccessful in meeting personal and academic goals.
>
> Because of a large amount of missing data, it is difficult to know how strongly to interpret findings and further how widely those findings should be generalized to all of LVA. The nature of the missing data indicates a lack of systematic record keeping on the part of some programs while the records kept by other affiliates are oriented solely toward perceived local organizational needs and so are limited. (p. 7)

This study highlights the importance of developing data collection mechanisms that serve the local level as well as providing information for national-level administrators.

Conclusion

The prevailing view of adult literacy problems as a short-term crisis that is amenable to limited intervention undermines efforts to build an infrastructure that supports progressive service delivery, resource development, staff development, program development, leadership, research, and policy analysis. Despite these constraints, adult literacy education is growing and evolving as a field. This is partly a tribute to the commitment of thousands of practitioners, policy makers, students, researchers, funders, and community leaders who have maintained their vision through difficult times. It is also a reflection of the slow process through which the field is moving from a narrow view of literacy as discrete skills to a richer recognition of the relationship among literacy, culture, people, and their circumstances.

This movement from a skills-based to a meaning-based model of literacy is central to progress in relation to literacy problems. It places learners' culture and experiences at the heart of literacy education, and it requires new partnerships among literacy practitioners, students, policy makers, and communities. When a meaning-based model is fully developed, it is participatory; students must be in a situation in which they experience themselves as having power in order to own the meanings of their words. When a participatory model is fully implemented, it is accompanied by social change, for it gives a voice to many who had been silent, and their voices go out into the world. Literacy education is always a political statement about the dignity and rights of every human being.

The issues discussed here are all ripe with potential. There are new policy mechanisms that could provide the basis for developing a long-term infrastructure at the national and state levels. There is a new, inquiry-based conception of staff development emerging that could provide the basis for staff development systems that respect practitioners' knowledge and experience. The two major foci for literacy work currently–work and families–could provide an impetus for contextualized curriculum development and instructional practices that reflect lessons from cognitive science, respect learners' background and culture, and provide a context for exploring the dynamic relationship between learning and functioning in communities and workplaces.

However, every one of these promising directions can be easily thwarted. The National Institute for Literacy and the State Resource Centers can become structures that further institutionalize traditional skills-based approaches, top-down leadership, and banking models of education. One-shot staff development workshops can be offered on practitioner inquiry. Workplace literacy education can train employees to fit into narrow niches, and family literacy programs can socialize women to limited aspirations and their children to school compliance. The focus on workplace and family literacy can undermine efforts to confront larger issues, such as the relationship between culture, language, and literacy, or the role of community in learning and change.

Staff development, program development, instruction, assessment, and evaluation are simply different arenas in which to apply a guiding philosophy. That philosophy can be one of domination or of shared power and respect. We all share the responsibility for moving toward a more just society in which literacy education that respects culture and honors wisdom is available for all.

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